

Analysis of the December 2016 electoral registers in the United Kingdom

March 2017

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We are an independent body set up by the UK Parliament. We regulate party and election finance and set standards for well-run elections. We work to support a healthy democracy, where elections and referendums are based on our principles of trust, participation, and no undue influence.

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1. Introduction

Our role

1.1 The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We work to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity.

1.2 The Commission undertakes the collection and analysis of data relating to electoral registration to allow us to better support Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in delivering high quality services. This data and analysis also informs our understanding of the effectiveness of the system of registration and ensures we are able to make evidence based recommendations for future changes to the system.

1.3 We have published several reports in recent years on electoral registration, particularly during the transition from household to individual registration, which have highlighted the issues and challenges associated with ensuring accurate and complete electoral registers in the modern world.

Key findings

The data presented in this report shows that since December 2015 across the United Kingdom:

- The local government registers have increased by 2.5% (ranging at local authority level from -3.8% to +9.0%)
- The parliamentary registers have increased by 2.3% (ranging at local authority level from -4.2% to +7.9%)
- The number of registered attainers has increased by 17.7% on the local government register and 22.4% on the parliamentary register

1.4 Overall, the data set out in this report suggests that our previous analysis of the system of registration still holds. The accuracy and completeness of the registers is likely to be stable but, as in 2015, this is in large part to be due to the importance attached to the May 2016 elections and the June 2016 referendum rather than the inherent efficiency of the registration system in capturing electors' details.

1.5 In Chapter 3 we highlight our existing recommendations designed to address the challenge of delivering a modern electoral registration system.

The system of electoral registration

1.6 There are 381 electoral registers in the United Kingdom: 380 in Great Britain, compiled and maintained by EROs, and one in Northern Ireland, managed by the Chief Electoral Officer.

1.7 All EROs in Great Britain are required to carry out an annual canvass in their area.¹ EROs must issue a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to all properties in their registration area and are legally required to take specific steps to follow up any non-responses to HEFs, including issuing two reminders and making a personal visit. This activity can begin anytime from 1 July and EROs are required to publish their revised register by 1 December.² The registers are updated on an ongoing basis and re-published each month, except during the autumn canvass.

1.8 The 1 December register is a snapshot of how the register stands at that date. EROs are not required to have completed all canvass activity – including following up with non-responders – by that time as their work in relation to maintaining an accurate and complete register continues throughout the year. The Commission also undertakes activity, including voter registration media campaigns, to support EROs in this work before scheduled elections.

1.9 The publication of the December registers therefore represents an important milestone in the annual cycle of the electoral registers (Figure 1). The December register figures are also those used for the official electoral statistics and for the review of electoral boundaries.

1.10 The Commission has previously recommended that the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the UK's parliamentary and local government boundary commissions should consider whether it would be more appropriate in future (ahead of the next scheduled review of UK parliamentary constituency boundaries which will use the December 2020 registers) to base constituency and boundary reviews on electorate data taken from the registers used for elections instead.

Data collection method and limits to data-analysis

1.11 This report presents our analysis of key data relating to entries on the December 2016 registers and the results of annual canvass activities conducted by local EROs.

¹ In Northern Ireland, Individual Electoral Registration operates under a continuous registration system and there is no annual canvass.

² In areas where a by-election had taken place during the canvass period (July to November), Electoral Registration Officers had the discretion to delay publication until 1 February 2017.

1.12 This data collection has been conducted in partnership with the Office for National Statistics (ONS), the National Records of Scotland (NRS) and the Electoral Office of Northern Ireland (EONI).

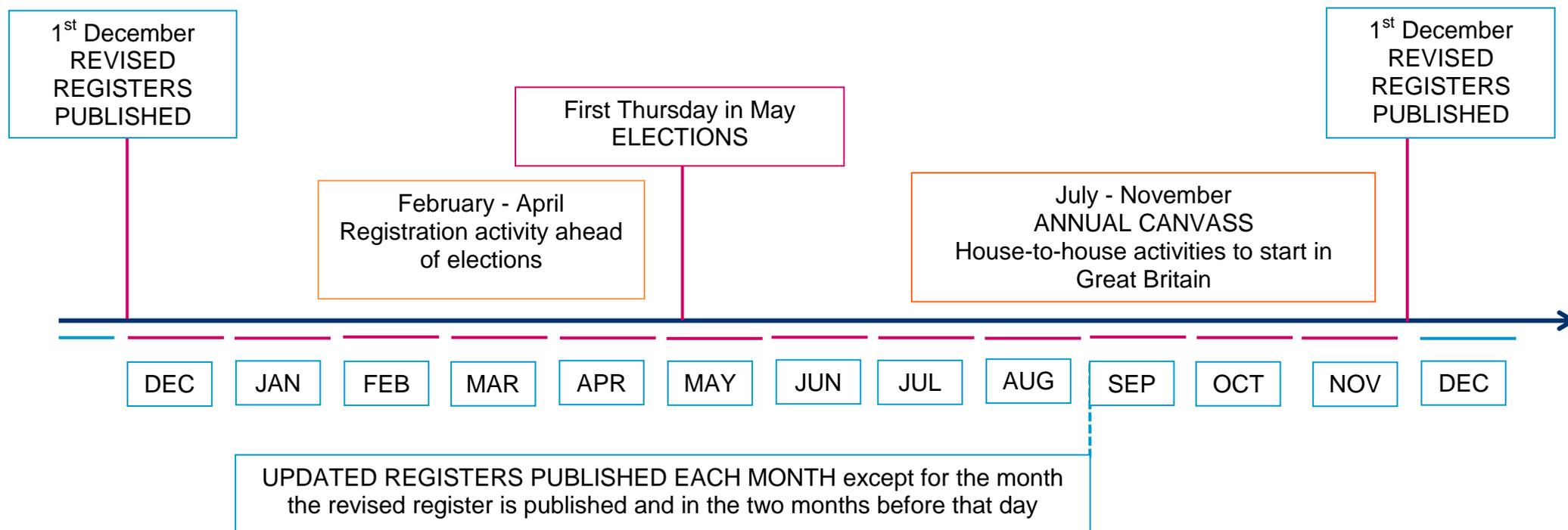
1.13 As in previous years, the collection and analysis of the data presented several challenges.³ We are confident that the aggregated data provides an accurate overview of the state of the registers but some of the detailed analysis at local authority level should be treated with caution due to potential inaccuracies.

1.14 This does mean that our ability to use the data as part of our work to monitor and assess EROs in Great Britain against our performance standards has been affected. We had hoped to have sufficient, accurate data available shortly after publication of the revised registers to support us to review the progress of individual EROs delivering registration activities in their area. However, the time taken to work through the collection and analysis issues has meant that we have been unable to complete the performance standards assessment process before the publication of this report. We are continuing to follow up with individual EROs, and will publish the conclusions of our assessments of performance against the standards in relation to the 2016 canvass after the May 2017 elections.

1.15 The Commission is committed to improving the quality of the data available to EROs and ourselves as part of our ongoing work to support EROs in delivering accurate and complete registers. We welcome Cabinet Office's engagement with this area of work through the Modern Electoral Registration Programme, and look forward to working with them to secure improvements for the future.

³ These challenges can once again be attributed largely to collecting data from different electoral register management software systems across Great Britain. The registers for 373 local authority areas are managed through four different Electoral Management Software (EMS) systems, and seven local authority areas use in-house software.

Figure1: Electoral registers through the year



2. Electoral register entries

2.1 Not every resident in the United Kingdom can register to vote. Entitlement to register comes from the entitlement to vote, which differs according to citizenship and the type of election. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are therefore required to maintain two electoral registers:⁴

- **Local government register:** used for Scottish Parliamentary, National Assembly for Wales, Northern Ireland Assembly, local government, European Parliamentary, and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.
- **Parliamentary register:** used for UK Parliamentary elections.

2.2 To be on one of these registers, a resident is required to have British, Irish, Commonwealth or European Union (EU) citizenship. Since 1999, EU citizens resident in the UK have been eligible to vote at local, devolved and European Parliamentary elections and are therefore entitled to be on the local government registers (they must then complete an additional form to be registered to vote in the European Parliament elections in the UK rather than their home country).

2.3 However, as they are not eligible to vote at UK Parliamentary elections they are not entitled to be on the parliamentary registers. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland the age at which citizens are entitled to vote at all elections is 18. In Scotland the voting age for Scottish Parliamentary and local elections is 16, and for UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections it is 18.

2.4 The registers also include **attainers**, citizens who are not currently old enough to vote but who will achieve voting age within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application. In England, Wales and Northern Ireland these are 16 and 17 year olds. In Scotland these are 16 and 17 year olds for the parliamentary registers and 14 and 15 year olds for the local government registers.

Local government registers

2.5 The number of entries on the local government registers in December 2016 was 47,350,696. This is an increase of 2.5% from December 2015.

Table 2.1: Total number of local government registers entries in December 2016

⁴ They must also keep a register of relevant citizens of the European Union entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections and a register of those peers living outside the UK who have made a declaration to vote at European Parliamentary elections.

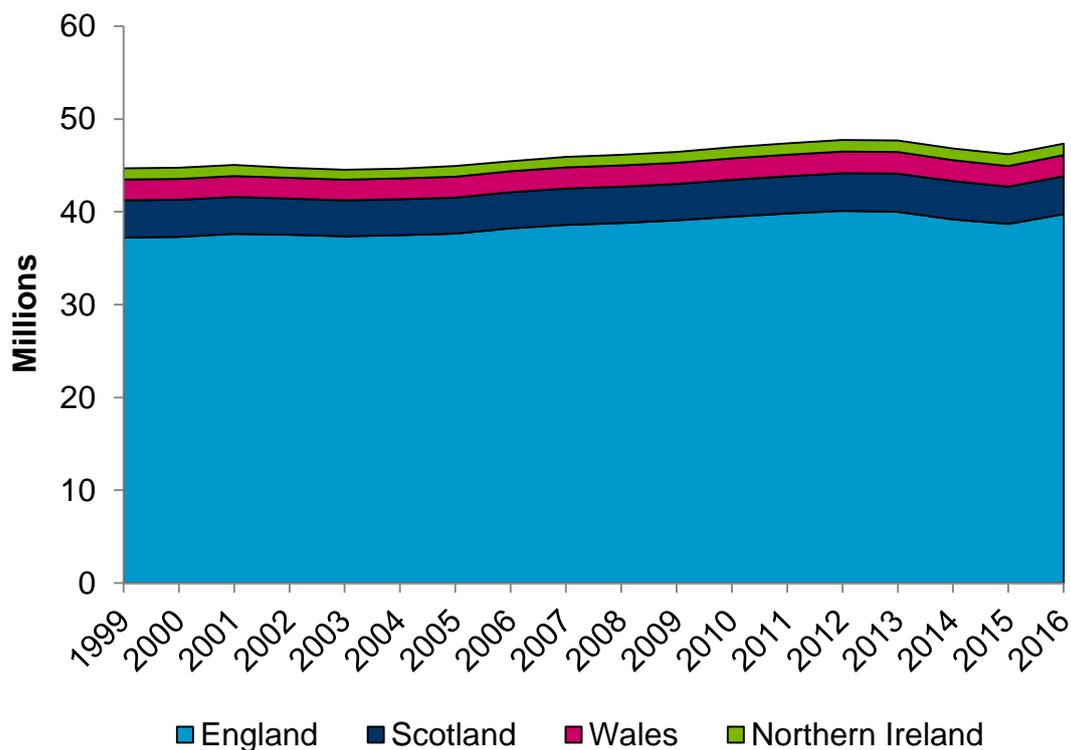
	December 2015	December 2016	+/-
England	38,696,091	39,756,852	+2.7%
Scotland	4,029,958	4,089,477	+1.5%
Wales	2,207,980	2,270,441	+2.8%
Northern Ireland	1,270,696	1,233,926	-2.9%
United Kingdom	46,204,725	47,350,696	+2.5%

2.6 This indicates a change from the trend seen during the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) – between June 2014 and December 2015 – when the revised registers published in December contained fewer entries than the previous year.

2.7 Our analysis suggests that the previous decline between 2014 and 2015 can be attributed to measures relating to the transition to IER: the lack of traditional household canvass activities in 2014 which were replaced by the ‘write-out’ and the removal of entries retained during the transition to IER.⁵ The high level of engagement with the 2016 referendum as well as the major polls in May 2016 is also a key reason for the rise we now see between December 2015 and December 2016.

⁵ The Electoral Commission, *Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (February 2016).

Figure 2.1: Total number of local government register entries.



The publication of the December 2013 registers was delayed to facilitate the transition to IER. The registers were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Scotland and Wales).

Attainers

2.8 Following a significant decline in the number of attainers recorded during the transition to IER (-40.0% between February/March 2014 and December 2015), the number of attainers on the local government registers has increased by 17.7% since December 2015.

2.9 In our report on the December 2015 registers we suggested that the decline in registered attainers may have been a result of the new requirement under IER for attainers to register themselves (rather than be registered by a parent or guardian via a household canvass form, as was previously allowed). We also noted that it was too soon to determine if this would be a long term trend.

2.10 While this data indicates there has been a recovery since December 2015, the number of registered attainers in December 2016 is still 30% smaller than the number in February/March 2014 at the end of household registration.

2.11 We have previously recommended that the registration of attainers presents an opportunity for the development of a more automatic approach to registration, for example at the point when individuals receive their national

insurance numbers. These latest figures suggest there is still a need to explore this potential.

Table 2.2: Total number of attainers on the local government registers in December 2016

	December 2015	December 2016	+/-
England	244,781	293,430	+19.9%
Scotland	21,343	22,035	+3.2%
Wales	12,462	13,810	+10.8%
Northern Ireland	5,350	5,000	-6.5%
United Kingdom	283,936	334,275	+17.7%

Parliamentary registers

2.12 The total number of entries on the parliamentary registers in December 2016 was 45,766,429.

2.13 This is an increase of 2.3% from December 2015 and a drop of 1.6% since the EU referendum in June 2016. This is explored in more detail in the next chapter.⁶

The largest ever parliamentary register was the one in use at the EU referendum: 46,475,882.

2.14 The change from December 2015 was more significant in England (2.6%) and Wales (2.8%) than in Scotland (0.8%). Northern Ireland's register is the only register to decrease in size from 2015 (by 3.0%). This can be attributed to the removal of 60,433 entries where no response was received either during the 2013 canvass or in two years following its conclusion.

2.15 The legislation enabling the canvass gave the Chief Electoral Officer the power to retain these entries where no response was received in order to avoid any immediate drop off in registration levels. It also set a point for their eventual removal in order to maintain the accuracy of the register – on the

⁶ Excludes Gibraltar. The total number of entries on the register used at the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union was 46,500,001 including Gibraltar.

basis that if no response was received either during the canvass or in the following two years they were likely to be redundant entries.⁷

Table 2.3: Total number of parliamentary registers entries in December 2016

	December 2015	December 2016	+/-
England	37,399,942	38,386,864	+2.6%
Scotland	3,896,852	3,929,963	+0.8%
Wales	2,181,841	2,243,919	+2.8%
Northern Ireland	1,243,369	1,205,683	-3.0%
United Kingdom	44,722,004	45,766,429	+2.3%

Attainers

2.16 The number of attainers on the parliamentary register has increased by 22.4% since December 2015.

Table 2.4: Total number of attainers on the parliamentary registers in December 2016

	December 2015	December 2016	+/-
England	239,019	284,522	+19.0%
Scotland	24,827	41,561	+67.4%
Wales	12,339	13,651	+10.6%
Northern Ireland	5,350	5,000	-6.5%
United Kingdom	281,535	344,734	+22.4%

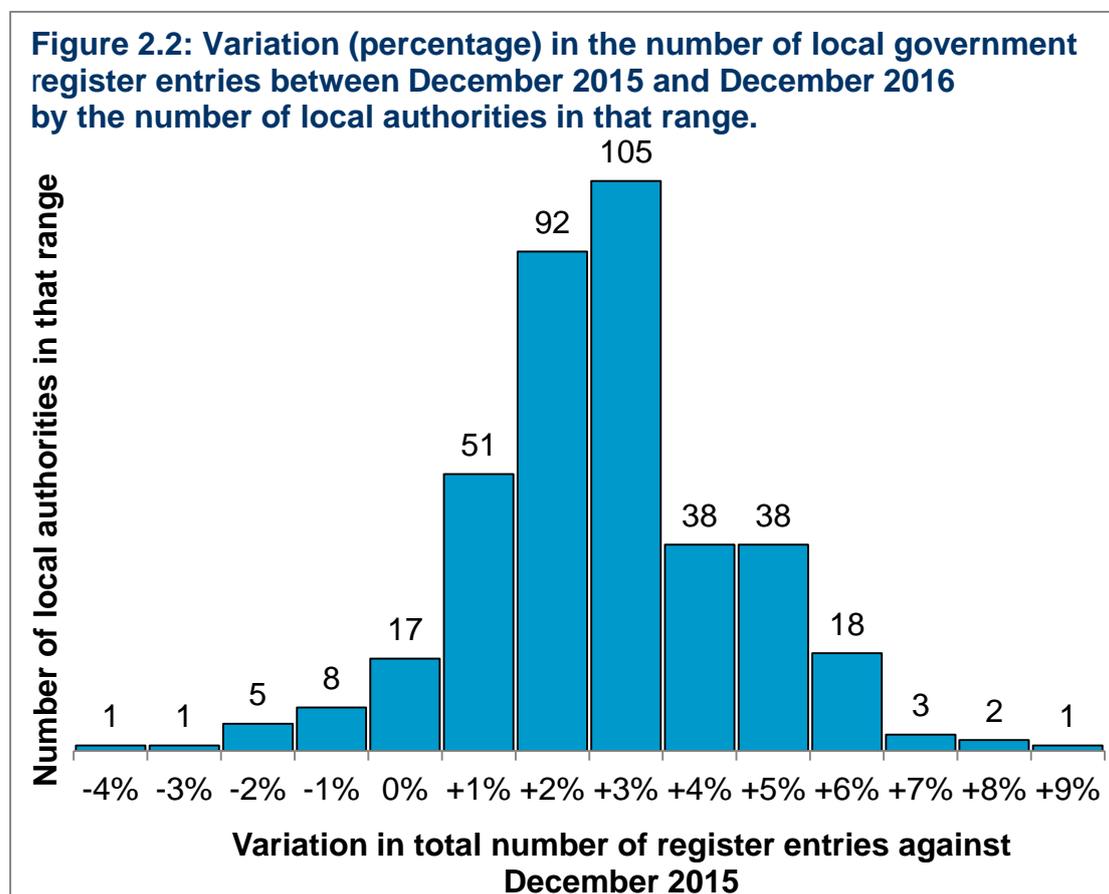
Local and constituency variations

Local authority changes

2.17 Changes to a local electorate year-on-year can be as a result of different factors. This can include the nature of scheduled polls, local electoral registration practices and the demographics of an area – including population mobility and growth.

⁷ Representation of People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2013.

2.18 As we would expect, change in the number of entries on the local government register varies across local authorities. Figure 2.2 below shows how changes are distributed across local authority areas: while a small number of areas reported a drop in number of register entries against December 2015 (15 in total), more than 90% of areas reported an increment, mostly of 2% or 3%.



2.19 The table below shows the most significant changes between December 2015 and December 2016 with Colchester (+9%) and Manchester (-3.8%) at each end of the spectrum.

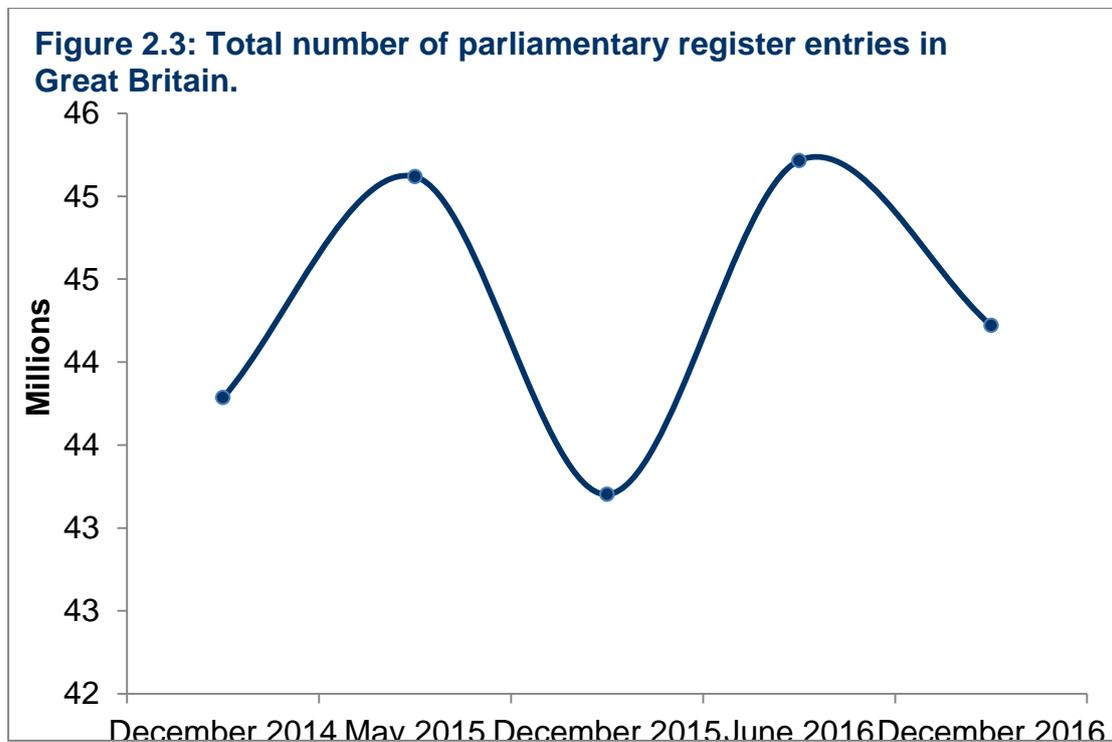
Table 2.5: Local authority registers with the largest increases and decreases in the number of entries

+/-	Local Authority	Total entries December 2016	Variation against December 2015
Increase	Colchester	133,775	+9.0%
	Croydon	270,392	+8.4%
	Cheshire East	296,368	+7.8%
	Lancaster	104,899	+7.0%

	Wellingborough	59,150	+6.7%
Decrease	York	147,099	-1.9%
	Cheltenham	87,082	-2.3%
	City of London	6,674	-3.0%
	Manchester	355,835	-3.8%

2.20 These changes are best understood in the context of electorate changes in 2016. For example, in the case of the increase seen in Colchester, the EU Referendum drove significant increases in registration with the electorate increasing by 7% between December 2015 and June 2016. Canvassing activity in the autumn has then resulted in a further, smaller increase in the electorate.

2.21 In the case of the decrease seen in Manchester, it is not simply the case that their electorate has decreased since December 2015 directly as a result of this year’s canvassing activity. In fact the Manchester electorate fell by 1.5% ahead of the EU referendum (between December 2015 and June 2016). This was partly because the electorate on a single date is a snapshot while there is ongoing population movement. For example, the 1 December 2015 electorate included entries which needed to complete legal processes before being removed in early 2016. There has then been a further reduction during the 2016 canvass (as more entries were deleted than new electors added). Figure 2.3 illustrates this fluctuation within years at a Great Britain level.



2.22 In relation to the longer term operation of the registration system, one of the most notable issues to emerge from the data is not necessarily the headline changes from December to December but how these electorates would look if the May 2016 polls and EU referendum had not driven such high levels of engagement in 2016.

2.23 Chapter 3 considers data on additions and deletions to the registers and speculates on what this tells us about the efficacy of the registration system.

Special category electors

Overseas

2.24 A UK citizen living abroad who has been registered to vote in the UK within the last 15 years can apply to be overseas voter. Their registration expires after 12 months.⁸

2.25 Overseas electors are eligible to vote in the UK Parliamentary elections and European Parliamentary elections. They were also entitled to vote in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union.

2.26 The total number of overseas electors on the Great Britain registers on 1 December 2016 was 263,902. This represents an increase of 144.2% since December 2015 with the majority of registrations made in the build-up to the EU referendum (135,255 of which were during our overseas public awareness campaign between 17 March and 9 June 2016).

Anonymous

2.27 Anonymous registration is available for people meeting certain requirements, whose safety, or the safety of someone in the same household, is at risk. People registered anonymously will have a code on the electoral register instead of their name and address. The total number of anonymous electors in Great Britain on 1 December 2016 was 2,323. This varies across local authorities from 0 to 392.

2.28 We do not hold data on the volumes of anonymous registrations for previous years.

⁸ Subject to a set of conditions which are set out in our [guidance](#), a British citizen living abroad is entitled to be registered as an overseas elector if they were either a person included in a register of parliamentary electors before they left the UK, or too young to be included on the register at the time they left the UK.

Table 2.5: Total number of entries (including attainers) on the local government registers in the UK

Electoral register entries (including attainers)	February/March 2014		December 2014		December 2015		December 2016	
England	40,001,780	-0.3%	39,184,984	-2.0%	38,696,091	-1.2%	39,756,852	2.7%
East	4,498,930	0.3%	4,427,092	-1.6%	4,383,531	-1.0%	4,510,261	2.9%
East Midlands	3,453,109	-0.8%	3,373,630	-2.3%	3,374,366	0.0%	3,472,990	2.9%
London	5,876,329	0.6%	5,738,498	-2.3%	5,645,254	-1.6%	5,827,705	3.2%
North East	1,988,732	-1.0%	1,917,638	-3.6%	1,889,352	-1.5%	1,923,025	1.8%
North West	5,358,051	0.1%	5,228,076	-2.4%	5,166,529	-1.2%	5,274,599	2.1%
South East	6,596,590	0.2%	6,459,179	-2.1%	6,354,265	-1.6%	6,560,844	3.3%
South West	4,120,440	-0.9%	4,066,898	-1.3%	4,010,990	-1.4%	4,127,304	2.9%
West Midlands	4,178,531	-1.5%	4,141,641	-0.9%	4,080,091	-1.5%	4,154,735	1.8%
Yorkshire and The Humber	3,931,068	-0.8%	3,832,332	-2.5%	3,791,713	-1.1%	3,905,389	3.0%
Wales	2,328,499	0.0%	2,254,219	-3.2%	2,207,980	-2.1%	2,270,441	2.8%
Scotland	4,120,494	1.4%	4,131,926	0.3%	4,029,958	-2.5%	4,089,477	1.5%
Northern Ireland	1,243,331	-0.3%	1,257,034	1.1%	1,270,696	1.1%	1,233,926	-2.9%
United Kingdom	47,694,104	-0.1%	46,828,163	-1.8%	46,204,725	-1.3%	47,350,696	2.5%

Source: Office for National Statistics (2013-16); Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) (2013 – 2016); the Electoral Commission (2016). Percentages next to the total number of entries show the variations from the previous year

3. The 2016 annual canvass

3.1 In addition to reviewing the state of the electoral registers, we analyse information relating to household activities undertaken by EROs during the annual canvass period (usually July to November). This is for Great Britain only as there is no equivalent canvass activity in Northern Ireland.

3.2 This chapter also makes use of data from the first half of the year, which includes the periods leading up to the May 2016 elections and the June 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union.

Form response rate

3.3 Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain are statutorily required to contact all households in their registration area every year by post. Non-responses should be followed up with two reminders and a personal visit as required. The process should commence between 1 July and 30 November but EROs do not need to complete all canvass activity within this period.

3.4 Individual Electoral Registration (IER) introduced a two-stage canvass approach:

- **Household Enquiry Form (HEF):** an initial HEF is sent to all properties. The person completing it for the household should cross-off any entries for people no longer resident and add the names of people eligible but not registered. When a name is crossed-off, EROs are required to obtain a second source of evidence in order to action the deletion.
- **Invitation to Register (ITR):** when a returned HEF contains a new name, a potential unregistered elector, an ITR is sent out. For an individual to make an application for registration, they are required to provide their National Insurance Number and date of birth. Individuals can also respond to ITRs by completing a registration application online.

3.5 Form response rates are as of 1 December 2016.

Household Enquiry Form (HEF)

3.6 Based on data from 276 local authority areas, the total HEF response rate was 87%. This represents an increase since the 2015 canvass (+5 percentage points) but the response rate is still lower than that achieved by

the household canvass form used before the introduction of IER (93% in 2013).⁹

3.7 As identified in *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* this may be explained by a number of factors such as the introduction of the new HEF form (which appears to be longer than the old canvass form although it asks for a similar amount of information), the ability to register online in response to a HEF instead of returning the paper form, and the fact that a number of EROs complete their annual canvassing activities after 1 December (see par. 3.5).¹⁰

3.8 At local authority level we see HEF return rate varying from 51% and 52% in Mendip and Uttlesford respectively to 100% in Cannock Chase, East Staffordshire and Lincoln.

3.9 These are substantial variations and while the response rate to the HEF does not directly equate to the completeness of the registers in the way the response to the old household canvass form did – because the HEF does not register anyone – it is still an indication that some areas are facing a bigger challenge than others in gathering data on their residents. We intend to use this data as a starting point for discussions with those EROs with lower response rates in order to understand the challenges in their area and how we can support them to improve response rates in the future.

Invitation to Register (ITR)

3.10 Based on data from 310 local authorities, the total ITR response rate was 41% on 1 December 2016. This represents an increase from 2015 (2 percentage points).¹¹

3.11 While this appears to be a low response rate it is likely to be a significant underestimation of the level of overall response to the ITR as it only includes paper responses and not online applications to register (because the EMS systems cannot track an online application made in response to a paper ITR).

Additions and deletions

3.12 The response to forms is useful data in judging how well the system is performing but it is primarily a measure of activity (forms issued by an ERO) and outputs (forms returned by an elector). The most relevant data, more

⁹ The 2015 HEF response rate presented in this report differs from the one presented in *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016) due to different base used to allow comparison with new data.

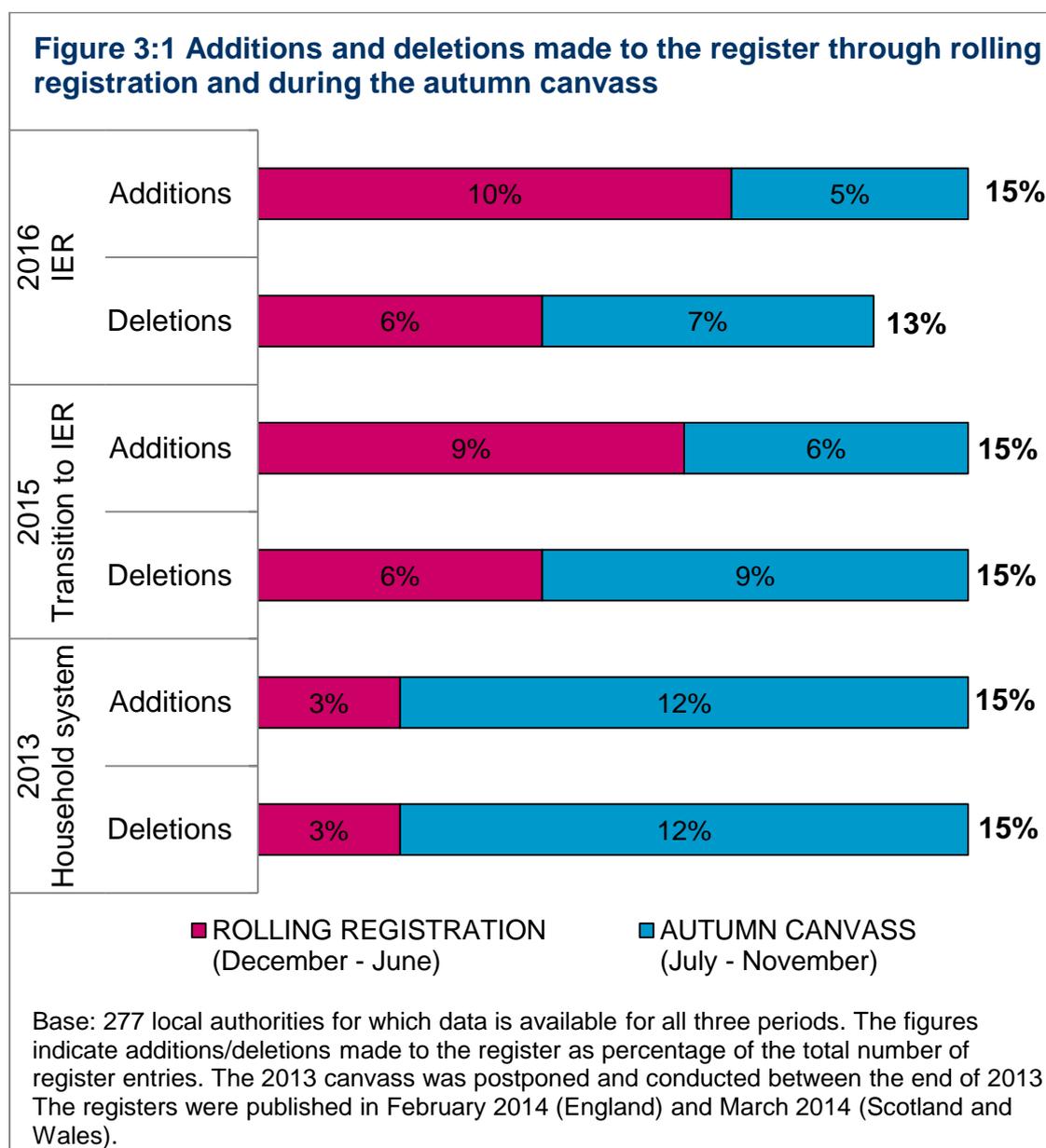
¹⁰ The Electoral Commission, *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016).

¹¹ The 2015 ITR response rate presented in this report differs from the one presented in *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016) due to different base used to allow comparison with new data.

closely linked to the impact an ERO is focused on, is on additions to and deletions from the registers.

3.13 Electoral registers are property-based and each record is linked to an address. EROs are required to add and delete records for home-movers, delete entries for those who have died, and add entries for newly eligible electors and those not previously registered. As population mobility varies across the country, so does the scale of the challenge that EROs face in maintaining the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers.

3.14 Figure 3.1 below shows additions and deletions as a percentage of the total number of entries made to the registers in 2016, between the publication of the revised registers in December 2015 and December 2016. The table shows that 15% of electors on the 1 December 2016 registers were added to the registers during 2016 and 13% of entries on the 1 December 2015 registers had been removed by 1 December 2016.



Timing

3.15 Under the household registration system, the majority of additions occurred during the autumn canvass period. In both 2015 and 2016, the majority of additions occurred outside of the annual canvass period.¹²

3.16 Figure 3.1 compares additions and deletions made to the register in 2016 against the previous year (2015), and the last year of the household system of registration (2013/14). As in 2015, two thirds of additions in 2016 occurred outside of the annual canvass period and mainly in the build-up to the 2016 electoral events in May and June.

3.17 In our report published in July 2016, we identified a closer relationship between registrations, completeness and turnout likely as a result of both individual registration and the availability of online registration.¹³ The high volume of additions in 2016 indicates that completeness may have increased since December 2015, when we found the local government and parliamentary registers to be 84% and 85% complete.¹⁴

3.18 While electoral events in 2015 (UK Parliament) and 2016 (EU referendum and devolved parliaments/assemblies) generated a high level of additions outside the canvass period, the registration system remains untested during years without high-turnout elections or no election at all in some areas.

3.19 Figure 3.1 also shows that a smaller proportion of entries from the previous register were deleted when the revised registers were published in December 2016 compared with December 2015 and December 2013. As in 2015, the majority of these deletions occurred during the annual canvass confirming the importance of annual household activities in maintaining the accuracy of the registers.¹⁵

3.20 The lower level of deletions in 2016 compared to 2015 can partly be attributed to the absence of the arrangements in place at the end of the transition to IER, where 1.7% of largely redundant entries were removed from the December 2015 registers.¹⁶ In Cambridge, for example, the number of deletions in 2016 was 53% lower than in 2015 but at the end of the transition

¹² The chart compares data for 2016 with 2015, as well as the last year of the previous system of electoral registration (2013/14). The figures indicate additions/deletions made to the register as percentage of the total number of register entries.

The 2013 canvass was delayed and conducted in early 2014 with the revised registers being published in March/February 2014. See The Electoral Commission, *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016).

¹³ The Electoral Commission, *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016).

¹⁴ Ibid.

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ The Electoral Commission, *Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (February 2016).

to IER in 2015 over 10,000 electors were deleted from the register directly as a result of the end of transition.

3.21 The level of deletions is also lower than in 2013 under household registration. This may be indicative of the changes to the system under IER (which were partly masked by the volume of entries removed at the end of transition). The lower level of deletions may be due to the lower HEF response rate compared to the old canvass form as well as challenges that EROs now face in obtaining evidence required to action a deletion. If lower levels of deletions become a feature of IER there is a risk of a cumulative decline in the accuracy of the registers over time.

Implications for the future

3.22 We have speculated here and in previous reports about what this data tells us about the likely long term impact of IER coupled with the current approach to the canvass.

3.23 However, we cannot know what the level of additions or deletions, as a result of the canvass, would have been without the May 2016 polls or the EU referendum – although it is almost certainly the case that both would have been higher as some changes – mainly additions – generated by interest in the referendum may have been picked up later in the year by the canvass if there had been no poll.

3.24 In order to make a definitive assessment of possible long term changes to the accuracy and completeness of the registers we need reliable data for a year without a large scale poll.

3.25 Even without this definitive assessment we do know that the current approach to the canvass is costly at a time when local authority budgets are tight. In our assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers we questioned whether the current system is sustainable in the longer term and concluded that it is not.

3.26 The data set out in this report suggests that both the accuracy or completeness of the registers remain stable but, as in 2015, this is likely in large part to be due to the importance attached to the May 2016 elections and the June 2016 referendum rather than the inherent efficiency of the registration system in capturing electors details.

3.27 We believe it is time to move away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead develop automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently than current resource intensive canvass processes.

3.28 In our July 2016 report, which also contains our full set of recommendations, we set out our vision of a modern electoral register as one which¹⁷:

- Uses trusted available public data to keep itself accurate and complete throughout the year without relying solely on action by individuals; and
- Makes it as easy as possible for electors to ensure their own registration record is accurate and complete, particularly ahead of elections and referendums.

3.29 The Modernising Electoral Registration Programme within Cabinet Office is taking forward several projects which could contribute towards realising this goal of a modern, efficient registration system. The Commission is committed to supporting them and working with them as appropriate in delivering these projects. This includes pilot schemes in 2016 and 2017 to test whether the current requirements on how to conduct the canvass in Great Britain could be changed to make the process more efficient. The Commission will evaluate these schemes with a final report due in June 2018.

3.30 The Digital Economy Bill, which is currently finalising consideration by the House of Lords, includes provisions which are intended to make it easier for public bodies to share data they hold in order to improve the delivery of public services to citizens. When the Bill receives Royal Assent we will explore further with the Cabinet Office Modernising Electoral Registration Programme what opportunities there are for using these provisions to improve the compilation and maintenance of electoral registers, in particular using appropriately reliable data so that EROs can better identify people who are not accurately registered.

3.31 We will also be developing our own plans and activities in this field within the coming months.

3.32 Our previous reports acknowledged that developing any form of automated registration will require detailed planning however we noted that there are a number of obvious areas where work could begin. These include:

- **Automatic registration of 16- and 17-year-old attainers** at the point National Insurance Numbers are initially distributed
- **Updating home-movers' details:** The majority of home-movers move within the same local authority area (59% in 2011), which suggests that there may be potential for EROs to be able to use trusted sources of local or national data to identify where there are changes (or no changes) required to the register.
- **Confirmation matching:** The experience of confirmation matching during the transition to IER in Great Britain also highlights the potential to

¹⁷ The Electoral Commission, *The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain* (July 2016).

simplify the process by which electors' identities are verified before being added to the register.

- **Identifying and removing duplicate register entries:** the dispersed nature of the electoral registers across Great Britain currently means that it is not possible to identify duplicate entries between registers which are managed by different EROs. Providing a mechanism for EROs to compare information about electoral register entries across all 380 registers would help to further improve the accuracy of electoral registers.

3.33 Findings from previous studies also suggested that additional tools could be provided to assist EROs in maintaining the registers. In particular, providing a way for electors to check their registration status at the beginning of the online registration application process would reduce the action required by voters to keep their register entry up to date, and would also reduce the impact on EROs of processing duplicate applications. The Modern Electoral Registration programme is currently looking at what might be put in place to address this and we will continue to work with them on this issue.