

electoral administration bulletin

The
Electoral
Commission

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EA Bulletins are issued on a regular basis. They are one of our key channels for communicating with Returning Officers, Electoral Registration Officers and their staff. Past issues of Bulletins for England, Scotland and Wales are available [here](#). You can also [subscribe to the EA Bulletins](#).

Please [keep us informed](#) of any staff changes within your team. This will help us to keep our mailing lists up-to-date.

We are sending you this newsletter as it contains important information about the Electoral Commission's work which is relevant to you. The newsletter forms part of the Electoral Commission's public task which has its basis in the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000. We will manage your personal



Issue 233 (Scotland) – 22 July 2019

Electoral Commission report on modernising electoral registration feasibility studies

The Electoral Commission has recently concluded work on a series of feasibility studies to explore options to modernise electoral registration in the UK. The studies examined how the system could be modernised further to make it easier for people to register to vote and for Electoral Registration Officers to maintain accurate and complete electoral registers. We considered the potential for giving EROs access to data from other public service providers; automatic or more automated forms of registration; and integration of electoral registration into other public service transactions.

Today we have published on our website [the main findings of the feasibility studies](#).

We found that a more data-driven, joined-up and year-round registration system could be implemented without radically altering the structure of the electoral registration system in the UK.

In particular, further development of the IER Digital Service, combined with new data-sharing mechanisms to support annual canvass reform, could pave the way for a more integrated electoral registration process. This could allow citizens to apply to register to vote as part of other online transactions, such as applying for a passport or driving licence. This could also provide the basis for developing systems to allow for automated or automatic registration in future.

We also considered ways in which duplicate registration applications could be better identified and managed within the current system. We have identified that the first step for any solution would be to enable the creation of a unique identifier for each elector. This would help identify duplicates arising from a change in an elector's details (e.g. address), as well as applications made by an elector who is already registered.

We hope that the findings of the feasibility studies will provide a strong basis for an exploration of more fundamental changes to the UK's electoral registration framework.

If you would like to discuss the findings of the studies further, please contact Mark Williams, Policy Manager on 020 7271 0566 or mwilliams@electoralcommission.org.uk.

Electoral Commission evaluation of the May 2019 voter identification pilot schemes

The Electoral Commission has today published its [statutory evaluation](#) of the May 2019 voter identification pilot schemes.

The pilot schemes were set up by the UK Government under the Representation of the People Act 2000 and were run by ten different local authorities in England – Braintree, Broxtowe, Craven, Derby, Mid Sussex, North Kesteven, North West Leicestershire, Pendle, Watford and Woking. The law requires the Electoral Commission to evaluate and report on any pilot scheme, including on the scheme's 'success or otherwise in facilitating voting at the elections in question'.

We found that a large majority of people already have access to the forms of ID used in these pilots. We also found indications that some groups of people can find it harder than others to show ID. There were no significant issues in any pilot area with the administration of the election. The experience of taking part in the pilot scheme appears to have had a positive impact on people's perception of the security of the polling station process.

The pilots have provided further evidence, but they do not allow for definitive conclusions to be drawn in all areas; several important questions remain about how an ID requirement would work in practice, particularly at a national poll with higher levels of turnout. Before introducing a requirement for elections in Great Britain, the UK Government and Parliament should consider carefully the available evidence about the impact and proportionality of different approaches on the accessibility and security of polling station voting.

Other key findings from the pilot areas are:

- Returning Officers and their staff ran the elections successfully in the pilot scheme areas, and there were no significant administrative issues in any pilot area. Polling station staff were satisfied with how polling day went and were confident that they could manage the process of people showing voter identification at future elections.
- Using scanners or other technology to check the validity of poll cards in polling stations would be much more complicated and costly for Returning Officers and polling station staff to deliver. These checks would not necessarily add more security than visual checks by polling station staff.

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- The experience of taking part in the pilot scheme appears to have had a positive impact on people's perception of the security of the polling station process, and on their confidence in it. This varied within each pilot model, across individual local authority areas.

Our recommendations

If the policy is to be developed further, the UK Government and Parliament should consider carefully the available evidence about the impact of different approaches on the accessibility and security of polling station voting in Great Britain. This should include evidence from the experience of polling station voters in Northern Ireland, who have been required to show ID since 1985 (including requiring photo ID since 2003), as well as the evidence from the local pilot schemes in both 2018 and 2019.

We have identified three key areas for further consideration:

- **Any ID requirement should deliver clear improvements to current security levels.** A photo ID requirement would provide the greatest level of security, but each of the models that have been piloted in 2018 and 2019 would provide some level of improved security compared with the current rules. The UK Government and Parliament should consider what level of security is proportionate to the risk of personation fraud in polling stations.
- **Any ID requirement should ensure accessibility for all voters.** While a large majority of people already have access to an acceptable form of photo ID, allowing only existing forms of officially issued photo ID would not be accessible for everyone. To make sure voting at polling stations remains accessible, there would need to be other options for people who do not already have an acceptable form of photo ID. This could involve providing free of charge locally issued photo ID, as currently provided for electors in Northern Ireland. Alternatively, it could involve allowing voters to use their poll card – on the current model or a different model – as the primary or secondary route to proving identity, depending on the level of security required.
- **Any ID requirement should be realistically deliverable, taking into account the resources required to administer it.** The pilot scheme has shown that some ID options would be more complicated for Returning Officers and polling station staff to deliver. The relative security benefits of these options would need to be considered alongside the impact on the administration of election procedures, particularly polling station processes.

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