

The
Electoral
Commission

Media Handbook

UK Parliamentary general election (UKPGE) – Northern Ireland

12 December 2019

A separate media handbook for Great Britain has been produced

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Our channels

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Websites

www.electoralcommission.org.uk

Our corporate website has a [dedicated section for journalists](#) featuring our press releases and statements. It has [information on political party donations](#) in the run-up to the election and has a guidance section with [information for candidates](#) and those [administering the election](#).

Our website also provides [information for the public](#) on how to register and vote, including forms they can print off to register and apply to vote by post or proxy.

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.gov.uk/register-to-vote

This website is where the public can register to vote online. It is quick and easy to use. Online registration has been available in Northern Ireland since June 2018. We encourage referring to this site in media coverage about the election to ensure members of the public know where they can register.

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Logistics

Roles and responsibilities at the poll

The UK Parliamentary general election (UKPGE) is taking place on Thursday 12 December. There are 650 Parliamentary constituencies in the UK. Each constituency is represented by one Member of Parliament in the House of Commons.

	Number of constituencies
Northern Ireland	18
England	533
Scotland	59
Wales	40

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

The Chief Electoral Officer, Virginia McVea, administers elections and compiles the register of electors in Northern Ireland. She 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 her duties by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland

The Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) aims to ensure the smooth running of elections and referendums in Northern Ireland while maintaining 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.

Presiding Officers

Presiding Officers are appointed by EONI to run polling stations. Duties include organising the layout of the polling station, supervising poll clerks, issuing ballot papers, checking photographic ID, assisting voters, accounting for all ballot papers and ensuring that ballot boxes are transported securely to the count venue or a ballot box collection point.

The Electoral Commission

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. Our role in these elections is to:

- produce guidance for candidates standing for election and their agents
- produce guidance for parties that are campaigning at the election
- produce guidance for non-party campaigners that are campaigning at the election
- register political parties and non-party campaigners
- raise public awareness of the elections and how to take part in them
- report on the conduct of the elections
- publish details of where political parties get their money from and how they spend it

Election Timetable

Event	Date (Deadline is midnight unless alternative stated)
Start of regulated period for political parties and non-party campaigners	Thursday 13 December 2018
Dissolution of Parliament	Wednesday 6 November
Start of 'short campaign' regulated period for campaign spending	No earlier than Thursday 7 November
Receipt of writ	Thursday 7 November
Writs are legal documents, which authorise the holding of a general election. When Parliament is dissolved prior to a general election, writs are issued to local authorities declaring that an election be held in each constituency.	
Official election notice	Not later than Monday 11 November (4pm)
Delivery of nomination papers	Between 10am and 4pm on any working day after the publication of the notice of election until Thursday 14 November (4pm)
Deadline for delivering nomination papers	Thursday 14 November (4pm)
Deadline for withdrawing nominations	Thursday 14 November (4pm)

Event	Date (Deadline is midnight unless alternative stated)
<p>Making objections to nomination papers</p> <p>(except for objections on the grounds that an individual candidate may be disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1981 – see Commission guidance)</p>	<p>Thursday 14 November (10am – 5pm) subject to:</p> <p>Between 10am and 12 noon, objections can be made to all delivered nomination papers</p> <p>Between 12 noon and 5pm objections can only be made to nomination papers delivered after 4pm on Wednesday 13 November</p>
<p>Publication of statement of persons nominated, including notice of poll and situation of polling stations</p>	<p>If no objections: Thursday 14 November (5pm)</p> <p>If objection(s) are made: Not before objection(s) are disposed of but no later than Friday 15 November (4pm)</p>
<p>Deadline for political parties and non-party campaigners to submit their first weekly pre-poll donation and loan report to the Electoral Commission</p>	<p>Tuesday 19 November</p>
<p>Deadline to apply to vote by post or proxy</p>	<p>Thursday 21 November (5pm)</p>
<p>Deadline for second pre-poll donation and loan report</p>	<p>Tuesday 26 November</p>
<p>Deadline to apply to register to vote</p>	<p>Tuesday 26 November</p>
<p>Deadline for third pre-poll donation and loan report</p>	<p>Tuesday 3 December</p>
<p>Deadline for fourth pre-poll donation and loan report</p>	<p>Tuesday 10 December</p>
<p>Polling day</p>	<p>7am to 10pm on Thursday 12 December</p>

Event	Date (Deadline is midnight unless alternative stated)
Election count	To start as soon as practicable after 10pm, Thursday 12 December with results expected to be announced on Friday 13 December
Deadline for fifth pre-poll donation and loan report	Tuesday 17 December
Deadline for sixth and final pre-poll donation and loan report	Thursday 19 December
Last day for delivering candidate spending returns	Friday 17 January 2020 (assuming the result is declared on Friday 13 December)
Last day for political parties and non-party campaigners who spent £250,000 or less to submit campaign spending returns to the Electoral Commission	Thursday 12 March 2020
Last day for political parties and non-party campaigners who spent more than £250,000 to submit campaign spending returns to the Electoral Commission	Friday 12 June 2020

Candidates

Becoming a candidate at the UK Parliamentary general election 2019

Who can be a candidate?

Candidates in the UKPGE on 12 December must be:

- at least 18 years old; and
- a British citizen, a citizen of the Republic of Ireland or a qualifying Commonwealth citizen

Candidates are not required to be registered to vote, or to live in the Parliamentary constituency in which they wish to stand.

Are there any rules barring a candidate from standing?

The rules around standing for election and the disqualifications that apply are complex. Further information can be found in [Part 1 of the Electoral Commission's guidance for candidates and agents](#).

When does someone become a candidate?

The earliest that a person can officially become a candidate is on the day that the UK Parliament is dissolved, which is **Wednesday 6 November**.

Prospective candidates may be selected by their party, or announce their intention to stand before this date.

What does someone have to do to stand as a candidate?

All prospective candidates must submit the following to the Returning Officer for the constituency they want to stand in by **4pm on Thursday 14 November**:

- a completed nomination form. Prospective candidates cannot submit the nomination form until the date stated on the notice of election
- a completed home address form
- their consent to nomination
- a deposit of £500

Candidates standing for a political party must also submit:

- a certificate from the political party authorising the use of the party name or a party description as registered by the Electoral Commission

- a written request to use one of the party's registered emblems (optional)

What candidate information can be included on the ballot paper?

Candidates standing for a political party can request the use of a party name or description on the ballot paper, but they cannot request both.

Independent candidates may only use the word 'Independent' as their description on the ballot paper; or they can choose not to have a description. They decide this when they complete their nomination form.

When will we know who all of the candidates are?

The EONI will publish the full list of candidates standing in each constituency. This will happen by 5pm on **Thursday 14 November**.

If objections to nominations are made, they will publish the updated candidate list no later than 4pm, **Friday 15 November**.

To find out how and where candidate lists are published, please contact EONI directly.

Political parties

Do parties contesting the elections have to be registered with the Commission?

Only those political parties registered with the Electoral Commission can have their name and approved descriptions and emblems appear on a ballot paper. If a party is not registered with the Commission, it can still campaign at elections, but any candidates it wants to stand on its behalf would have either nothing or 'independent' next to their name, rather than a party name.

Do candidates have to stand under a political party name?

No, a person may stand as an independent candidate, i.e. not for any political party.

Candidate campaign spending limits and rules on accepting donations

Regulated period

What is the regulated period?

The regulated period is the period in the run up to an election during which electoral spending rules apply to campaigning. Candidates must report all spending which takes place during this period.

For the 2015 general election, there were two regulated periods for candidates, known as the 'long campaign' and 'short campaign', during which spending limits applied. For the election on Thursday 12 December, there is **only a short campaign**.

The long campaign occurs when a UKPGE has been called and Parliament has already been sitting for 55 months. In the case of the December 2019 election, the UK Parliament has sat for less than 29 months.

The regulated period for candidates standing at the December 2019 UKPGE begins **the day after** a person officially becomes a candidate and ends on polling day, **Thursday 12 December**.

The earliest date a person can officially become a candidate is **the day** the UK Parliament is dissolved. Parliament will be dissolved on **Wednesday 6 November**.

If an individual's intention to stand as a candidate is not announced before **Wednesday 6 November** the short campaign will begin either the day they announce their intention to stand or the date they are nominated as a candidate, whichever is earliest.

Spending

What happens if money is spent on a political party candidate before the regulated period?

Any spending promoting a candidate standing for a political party before the candidate's regulated period starts will fall under the rules for party spending.

Further [guidance on party candidate spending can be found on the Commission's website](#).

What are the spending limits?

The spending limit for candidates during the regulated period is £8,700 plus a variable amount based on the number of registered parliamentary electors in the constituency they are contesting.

Regulated period	Fixed amount	Variable amounts	
		Borough constituency	County constituency
From Wednesday 6 November to Thursday 12 December (polling day)	£8,700	6p per registered Parliamentary elector	9p per registered Parliamentary elector

How do candidates know how many people live in the constituency they are standing in?

The number of Parliamentary electors in a particular constituency is based on the electoral register as it stands on the last date for publication of the notice of election on Monday 11 November.

Candidates can contact the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland to request the most up-to-date number of electors to help them plan their spending during the campaign.

What activities count towards the spending limit?

Candidate spending includes the costs of:

- advertising of any kind, such as posters, newspaper adverts, websites, online display advertising, promoted social media posts or YouTube videos
- unsolicited material sent to voters, such as letters, leaflets or emails that are not sent in response to specific queries
- transport costs, such as hire cars or public transport for the candidate's campaigners
- public meetings
- staff costs (e.g. an agent's salary, or staff seconded to a candidate)
- accommodation (e.g. a campaign office)
- administrative costs (e.g. telephone bills, stationery, photocopying and the use of databases)

Activities that do not count include:

- payment of a candidate's deposit

- anything (except adverts) appearing in a newspaper or on a licensed broadcast channel
- use of public meeting rooms
- volunteer time including time spent by the candidate's staff that they do not pay them for
- use of someone's main residence, provided free of charge
- use of someone's personal car or other means of transport acquired principally for that person's personal use and provided free of charge
- general computer equipment bought for the candidate's personal use

Donations

Who can make donations to candidates?

Anyone can make a donation worth £50 or less to candidates. Candidates are not required to declare donations with a value of £50 or less in their spending and donations return.

There are no limits on the number of donations a candidate can accept during the UKPGE. Candidates must ensure that any donation worth more than £50 is only accepted if it is from a permissible source. This applies to cash donations and donations in kind. Donations that are not from a permissible source must be returned to the donor within 30 days. After that, the donation may be forfeited.

Permissible donors in the UK are defined as:

- an individual on a UK electoral register
- a GB registered political party
- a Northern Ireland registered political party
- a UK registered trade union
- a UK registered building society
- a UK registered limited liability partnership
- a UK registered friendly society
- a UK based unincorporated association
- a UK registered company which is incorporated within the EU and carries on business in the UK

Candidates cannot accept donations over £50 unless they are permissible.

Does campaign spending by a political party in a particular constituency count towards a candidate's spending limit?

Sometimes. Spending does not need to be counted against both the candidate's and the party's spending limit. An item of spending will generally fall into one category or the other:

- spending on activity that promotes the candidate is likely to count towards the candidate's spending limit – for example, a letter sent to electors introducing the candidate and their local policies
- spending on activity that promotes the party and not the candidate is likely to be covered by the rules on party campaign expenditure – for example, a local newspaper advertisement that features the party's national policies and logo, but does not mention the local candidate or specifically targeted local issues

Where a political party spends money promoting a particular candidate, then that spend will count towards the candidate's spending limit.

To what extent can political parties fund their candidates?

Many political parties run a local 'fighting fund' for their candidate. If the fund is managed and controlled by the party and not the candidate, then donations to the fund are usually treated as having been made to the party, unless the donations are specially made towards the candidate's campaign.

However, during the regulated period, any donations made by the party to a candidate above £50 must be reported in the candidate's spending return.

What are the rules on crowdfunding?

Candidates and parties may accept donations using crowdfunding websites, often managed by third party providers, which pass the donations to the candidate or party minus a fee.

Crowdfunding pages should make donors aware of the rules covering permissibility and declarations of donations and the possibility that donors names will appear publicly. It is also the responsibility of the candidate to ensure that they collect sufficient information to properly complete their reporting obligations including reporting how donations from impermissible donors have been dealt with.

For reporting purposes, the date of receipt of a donation is the date on which the funds are received from the third party crowdfunding site. If a donation received in this way is from an impermissible source it must be returned within 30 days.

The Commission has published [guidance on crowdfunding donations and the rules on permissibility](#).

Reporting

Who do candidates report their regulated spending to and when?

Agents for candidates must submit their campaign spending returns to the Chief Electoral Officer within 35 days of the election result being declared.

If no spending is incurred, a nil return must be submitted by the agent.

What happens if a candidate exceeds their spending limit?

Allegations relating to the Representation of the People Act 1983 (RPA) including candidate spending offences, are generally made to the police to consider.

Whilst the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to monitor compliance with parts of the RPA relating to candidate and agent expenses, it is not legally empowered to investigate and impose sanctions for offences under the RPA..

[Part 3 of the Commission's guidance for candidates and agents](#) contains further information on spending and donations for candidates in Northern Ireland.

Political Parties: Campaign spending limits and rules on accepting donations

Regulated period

What is the regulated period?

The regulated period is the period in the run up to an election during which electoral spending rules apply to campaigning. Political parties must report all spending which takes place during this period.

The regulated period for the December 2019 UKPGE began on **Thursday 13 December 2018** and ends on polling day, **Thursday 12 December 2019**.

Spending

How much can political parties spend at the UKPGE?

The regulated period for the UKPGE overlaps with the regulated period for the European Parliamentary election on 23 May 2019. If a party stood candidates in this election as well as the 2019 UKPGE, this will affect their spending limit.

The spending limit for parties is therefore the total of their spending limit in the EPEs, added to their spending limit in a UKPGE. [Please see the Commission's guidance for more details.](#)

How much can political parties spend at the UKPGE if they did not stand candidates at the European parliamentary elections?

The amount a political party that is contesting the UKPGE in Northern Ireland can spend if they **did not stand** candidates at the European parliamentary elections, is

- £30,000 multiplied by the number of seats a party is contesting. There are 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland

Example

A party is contesting 12 constituencies in Northern Ireland.

The party's spending limit will be: £30,000 x 12 = £360,000

How much can political parties spend at the UKPGE if they did stand candidates at the European parliamentary elections?

If a party is contesting the 2019 UKPGE in Northern Ireland **and** also contested the elections to the European parliament in May 2019, then their **spending limits for the two elections are combined.**

Parties can carry over any unused portion of their spending limit from the European parliamentary election for use on spending at the UKPGE.

This would be:

- £30,000 multiplied by the number of seats a party is contesting in Northern Ireland for the UKPGE. There are 18 constituencies in Northern Ireland

Plus

- £135,000 (This was the spending limit for parties who stood candidates Northern Ireland at the European Parliamentary elections)

What activities count towards the spending limit?

Activities included in campaign spending are:

- party advertising of any kind, such as posters, newspaper adverts, websites, online display advertising, promoted social media posts or YouTube videos
- unsolicited material sent to voters, such as letters, leaflets or emails that are not sent in response to specific queries
- the manifesto and other documents setting the party's policies
- market research or other methods of finding out which party people intend to vote for
- party press conferences or other dealings with the media
- party rallies and events, including the cost of people's attendance, and any goods, services or facilities provided
- transport in connection with promoting or publicising the party

Activities not included in campaign spending are:

- permanent, fixed term or temporary staff costs where the staff member has a direct employment contract with the party
- volunteer time
- office running costs, except costs that are higher than usual because of campaigning, such as telephone bills
- people's travel, food and accommodation costs while they campaign, unless the party reimburses them
- expenses met out of public funds. For example, security costs for VIP visits

- material sent only to party members
- party conferences
- local newsletters about elected representatives or prospective candidates
- anything which a candidate properly declares on their spending return

Donations

Which donations can parties and campaigners accept?

In line with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), before a party accepts any donation or loan of more than £500, it must take all reasonable steps to make sure it knows the identity of the true source and to check that the source is permissible. The party has the legal obligation to check permissibility prior to accepting donations.

There are no limits on the number of donations a party can receive, however parties can only accept a donation from a permissible donor. A permissible donor is:

- an individual registered on a UK electoral register, including those overseas and those leaving bequests
- a UK registered company which is incorporated within the EU and carries on business in the UK
- a UK registered trade union
- a GB registered political party
- a UK registered building society
- a UK registered limited liability partnership that carries on business in the UK
- a UK registered friendly society
- a UK based unincorporated association that carries on business in the UK

In addition, political parties in Northern Ireland can take donations from Irish citizens and UK or Irish companies. [More information on donations in Northern Ireland is available on our website](#)

Reporting

Who do political parties report their regulated spending to and when?

Political parties must report their spending to the Electoral Commission. The deadline for reporting spending of £250,000 or under is **Thursday 12 March 2020**. The deadline for reporting spending over £250,000 is **Friday 12 June 2020**.

[The Commission's website contains further guidance for political parties in Northern Ireland campaigning at the UKPGE.](#)

What are the publications dates for the weekly donation and loan reports?

Political parties' central HQs must submit weekly donation and loan reports setting out what donations and loans they have received over £7,500 after **Wednesday 6 November** until polling day.

Reporting period	Deadline to submit report	Publication date
6 Nov 2019 – 12 Nov 2019	19 Nov 2019	Thurs, 21 Nov 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
13 Nov 2019 – 19 Nov 2019	26 Nov 2019	Thurs, 28 Nov 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
20 Nov 2019 – 26 Nov 2019	3 Dec 2019	Thurs, 5 Dec 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
27 Nov 2019 – 3 Dec 2019	10 Dec 2019	Wed, 11 Dec 2019 – not before 4:30 pm
4 Dec 2019 – 10 Dec 2019	17 Dec 2019	Thurs, 19 Dec 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
11 Dec 2019 – 12 Dec 2019 (shorter than 7 days)	19 Dec 2019	Mon, 23 Dec 2019 – not before 2:30 pm

Non-party campaigners

Registering

What are the rules for non-party campaigners?

Non-party campaigners are individuals and organisations that campaign in the run up to elections but do not stand as political parties or candidates.

There are two types of non-party campaigns and certain rules apply to their spending within the regulated period. These are:

- Local campaigns: non-party campaigns for or against a candidate in a particular constituency. For example, if a local alliance campaigns for a candidate in their constituency
- General campaigns: non-party campaigns for or against a political party, or particular categories of candidate, including campaigns on policies or issues closely associated with a particular party or category of candidates. For example, an issue-based campaign group campaigns against a political party across the whole of the UK

Local campaigns are regulated by the police. General campaigns are regulated by the Electoral Commission.

The Commission has published [new guidance for non-party campaigners to promote their understanding of the rules and support them to campaign with confidence all year-round](#).

When must a non-party campaigner register with the Electoral Commission?

Non-party campaigners must register with the Commission if they intend to spend more than £10,000 in Northern Ireland on regulated activity, on a general campaign, during the regulated period.

What general campaign activities are regulated?

Spending on the following activities can be regulated:

- election material
- canvassing and market research
- public rallies or public events
- press conferences or other media events
- transport in connection with publicising your campaign

Further [guidance on the tests which determine if spending is regulated can found on the Commission's website.](#)

Spending

What are the spending limits for local campaigns?

At the December 2019 UKPGE, the spending limit for local campaigns by non-party campaigners is £700 in a Northern Ireland constituency. This limit applies from the date Parliament is dissolved, i.e. **Wednesday 6 November**.

What are the spending limits for general campaigns?

Campaigners spending more than a certain amount on general campaigning have to register with the Electoral Commission.

During the regulated period for the UK Parliamentary general election, the maximum amount a registered or unregistered non-party campaigner can spend on general regulated campaign activity in a particular parliamentary constituency is £9,750.

The regulated period for the December 2019 UKPGE began on **Thursday 13 December 2018** and ends on polling day, **Thursday 12 December 2019**. This includes the regulated period for the European Parliamentary elections on 23 May 2019.

Any spending on regulated activity that met the public and purpose tests at elections in Northern Ireland in that period (including Local Government elections) will now count towards the non-party campaigner's spending limit in Northern Ireland.

The spending limits for non-party campaigners are:

Part of the UK	Registered with the Electoral Commission?	
	No	Yes
England	£20,000	£479,550
Scotland	£10,000	£73,400
Wales	£10,000	£55,259
Northern Ireland	£10,000	£37,550

Further [guidance on the public and purpose tests which determine if spending is regulated can found on the Commission's website](#).

Reporting

Do non-party campaigners have to report donations to the Electoral Commission?

Like political parties, registered non-party campaigners can only accept donations of over £500 given for regulated activity, if they are from a permissible source. They must report any donations that total over £7,500 to the Electoral Commission. These donations are reported along with spending after the poll.

What are the pre-poll reporting requirements for non-party campaigners?

Registered non-party campaigners must report donations received during the regulated period over a certain value to the Electoral Commission before the date of the poll. This is called 'pre-poll reporting'.

Registered non-party campaigners must submit weekly donation reports setting out what donations they have received over £7,500 after **Wednesday 6 November until polling day**.

Reporting period	Deadline to submit report	Publication date
6 Nov 2019 – 12 Nov 2019	19 Nov 2019	Thurs, 21 Nov 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
13 Nov 2019 – 19 Nov 2019	26 Nov 2019	Thurs, 28 Nov 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
20 Nov 2019 – 26 Nov 2019	3 Dec 2019	Thurs, 5 Dec 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
27 Nov 2019 – 3 Dec 2019	10 Dec 2019	Wed, 11 Dec 2019 – not before 4:30 pm
4 Dec 2019 – 10 Dec 2019	17 Dec 2019	Thurs, 19 Dec 2019 – not before 2:30 pm
11 Dec 2019 – 12 Dec 2019 (shorter than 7 days)	19 Dec 2019	Mon, 23 Dec 2019 – not before 2:30 pm

When must non-party campaigners report their spending to the Electoral Commission?

Registered non-party campaigners that have spent £250,000 or less must submit their return to the Electoral Commission by **Thursday 12 March 2020**. The deadline for reporting spending over £250,000 is **Friday 12 June 2020**.

Campaigning at the election

What can candidates say about one another during the campaign?

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

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

As with all elections, the Electoral Commission does not have any regulatory role in relation to the content of campaign material or what candidates say about each other.

Intimidation of candidates at elections

We recognise that robust political debate is part of a healthy democracy, but sometimes things can go too far.

The Commission has worked with The National Police Chiefs Council and the Crown Prosecution Service to produce guidance documents for candidates and campaigners, to help **them understand when behaviour goes beyond political debate and may be unlawful**.

- [When it goes too far](#) is a short guide which provides general advice
- [Joint guidance for candidates in elections](#) provides more detail on the nature of possible offences
- [Guidance for election candidates in Scotland](#)

From July 2018 to October 2018, the Cabinet Office ran [a consultation on intimidation, influence and information at elections](#). In May 2019, following the publication of the consultation outcome, the Government announced [its plans to introduce a new offence in electoral law on intimidating a candidate or campaigner during the run up to an election, either in person or online](#).

Are there any electoral rules regarding campaign materials?

By law, candidates, must use 'imprints' on all their printed campaign material. An imprint includes the name and address of the printer and promoter (the person who authorised the material to be printed). It must be included on all printed material such as posters, placards and leaflets. It is an offence not to include an imprint on printed candidate material. Political parties and non-party campaigners should also include an imprint on all their printed materials. This is so that electors can be clear about the source of the campaign material.

Though it is not a legal requirement, the Electoral Commission recommends that candidates, parties and non-party campaigners wherever possible, place an imprint on

their electronic materials (e.g. websites, emails and social media platforms). Voters need to know who is targeting them with political messages online and we have called for the law to be changed.

In May 2019, [the UK Government announced it would work with the Cabinet Office, the Department for Digital, Culture, Media and Sport and other stakeholders to extend imprints to digital communications.](#)

Can candidates see the electoral register?

Once someone legally becomes a candidate, they are entitled to receive, free of charge, a copy of the full electoral register and the lists of people voting by post or proxy (the absent voters' lists) for the constituency that they are contesting.

Candidates may only use the full electoral register to help them complete their nomination form, to campaign and to check that donations they receive come from a permissible source.

Are candidates entitled to a free delivery of leaflets?

Yes, candidates are entitled to one free mailing (by Royal Mail) to electors in the constituency they are contesting. This includes:

- one unaddressed election communication of up to 60 grams to every postal address, or
- one election communication of up to 60 grams addressed to each elector

Candidates contact Royal Mail directly to make the arrangements for their leaflets. The costs of the material itself is not covered, only the postage.

What rules apply to hustings?

Hustings can be organised by anyone, and are events designed to give the public an opportunity to hear from the candidates or parties standing for election in their constituency.

There is no legal requirement for the person organising a husting to invite all candidates or parties standing in a constituency. However, spending on hustings may be regulated depending on how it is organised. This may happen where the organiser selectively invites or excludes candidates or parties.

The Commission has [further guidance on the organisation of hustings.](#)

How many election broadcasts are political parties entitled to?

Television broadcasters decide how many party election broadcasts (PEBs) are allocated to political parties.

Political parties pay for and produce the content of PEBs, which must observe the law on, for example, copyright, defamation, contempt, obscenity and incitement to racial hatred or violence.

They must comply with the [Ofcom Broadcasting Code](#) and the BBC Editorial Guidelines that relate to harm and offence and fairness and privacy.

Are there rules on impartiality for the media during the UKPGE?

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.

TV, radio and online debates between party leaders are also a matter for the relevant broadcasters and newspapers. The Electoral Commission has no regulatory role in relation to debates between party leaders or PEBs.

Election Pacts

What are election pacts?

An election pact is an agreement that a party or candidate will not stand in a particular area, in order to give another party or candidate a better chance of winning the seat.

The Commission has published [new guidance](#) for parties and campaigners who are considering entering into an election pact, or who have already done so.

Are election pacts allowed?

Election pacts are not defined in electoral law, however there is nothing that prevents or prohibits them from taking place.

Parties or candidates can reach an agreement not to stand a candidate, in order to give another candidate or party a better chance of winning a seat. If candidates or parties reach this kind of agreement, rules apply and funding and spending must be appropriately reported.

What rules apply to those who want to enter an election pact?

The same spending and donation rules apply to those in election pacts as those who are not in an election pact. The rules are complex and can vary depending on the specific facts of each individual agreement reached.

For example, in some instances spending will appear in the return for the party or candidate standing, in other instances it may be spending on behalf of the party that stands aside. The non-party campaigner rules may also apply.

The Commission's [guidance on election pacts provides further examples](#) for parties and campaigners.

Digital campaigning

Should social media be used during an election campaign?

There are a number of challenges posed by the rise of digital campaigning, though it is important to also recognise the benefits of this approach and the use of social media platforms, which are a great way for candidates and campaigners to engage with people directly on important issues.

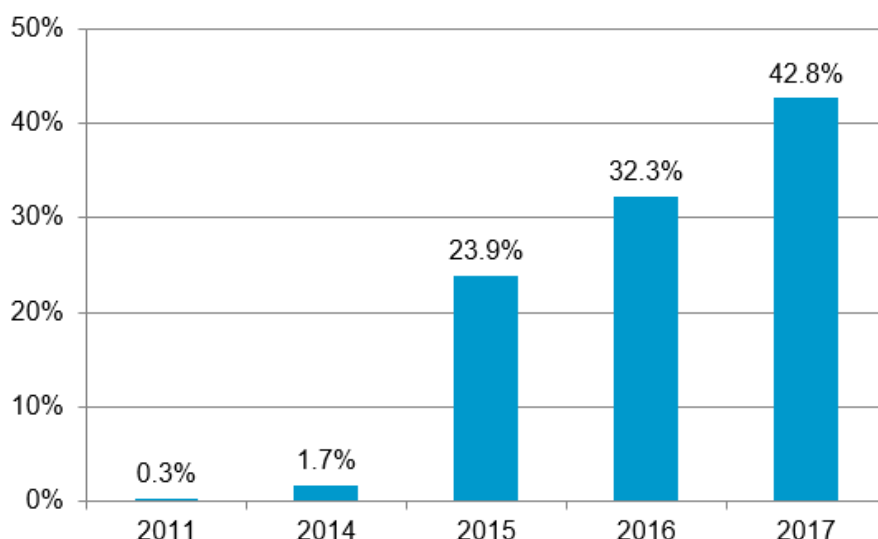
We have made a number of recommendations in this area, which you can find in the Commission's [digital campaigning report](#). For voters, transparency of political finance is hugely important. We continue to urge the Government, specifically the Cabinet Office, to introduce legislation that would improve transparency for voters, such as by making imprints on digital electoral campaign material a legal requirement.

How much was spent on digital campaigns at the 2015 and 2017 general elections?

At the 2015 general election, spending by campaigners on digital advertising was 23.9% of total campaign spend. This increased to 42.8% at the 2017 general election.

Further information on the increase in digital advertising spend by campaigners can be found in the Commission's [digital campaigning report](#).

Chart 1: Reported spending by campaigners on digital advertising as a percentage of total advertising spend



What are the Commission's recommendations for digital campaigning?

In June 2018 the Commission published its report, [Digital campaigning: Increasing transparency for voters](#).

The Commission's recommendations, set out below, would increase the transparency of digital campaigns and help to ensure that UK voters are confident that digital campaigns are following the UK's electoral rules.

- Digital campaign material must have an imprint saying who is behind the campaign and who created it.
- Campaigners should sub-divide their spending returns into different types of spending and should give more information about the money spent on digital campaigns.
- Social media companies should work with us to improve their policies on campaign material and advertising for elections and referendums in the UK.
- UK election and referendum adverts on social media platforms should be labelled to make the source clear. Online databases of political adverts should follow the UK's rules for elections and referendums.
- Spending on election or referendum campaigns by foreign organisations or individuals should be prohibited.
- The maximum fine we can sanction campaigners for breaking the rules should be increased, and our powers to obtain information outside of an investigation should be strengthened.

Electoral Fraud

Voting offences

The Representation of the People Act 1983 specifies a number of criminal offences relating to electoral fraud. The relevant police force for the area in which the election is taking place would investigate any allegations that an offence may have taken place.

Every police force in the UK has a designated single point of contact (known as a SPOC) to lead on election-related crime, who will give advice to local police officers. People can also choose to contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Anyone, including candidates, politicians and members of the public, who has evidence of electoral fraud taking place should report it to the police immediately, using the 101 non-emergency number, unless there is a crime in progress.

Offences include:

- **Personation** – where an individual votes as someone else (whether that person is living, dead or fictitious), either by post or at a polling station, in person or as a proxy.
- **Undue influence / intimidation** – A person is guilty of undue influence if they attempt to influence someone's vote by:
 - using or threatening force, violence or restraint
 - inflicting or threatening injury, damage, loss or harm
 - impeding or preventing someone from freely exercising their right to vote – even where the attempt is unsuccessful.
- **Bribery** – A person is guilty of bribery if they directly or indirectly offer any reward (financial or otherwise) in order to induce any voter to vote or refrain from voting.
- **Treating** – A person is guilty of treating if either before, during, or after an election they offer food, drink or entertainment to corruptly influence any voter. Treating requires a corrupt intent - it does not apply to ordinary hospitality.
- **False statements** – It is an offence to make or publish a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of a candidate in order to affect the return of a candidate at an election. False statements that are not about a candidate's personal character or conduct are not illegal under electoral law, but could be considered as libel or slander. It is an offence to knowingly provide a false statement on a nomination paper.

- **Multiple voting and proxy voting offences** – There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting (whether in person, by post or by proxy) when you are not allowed to and voting more than once in the same election.
- **False information in connection with registration and absent voting** – It is an offence to supply false registration information to an Electoral Registration Officer. It is also an offence to supply false information for a postal or proxy vote.

What safeguards are in place to ensure postal voting is secure?

Postal voters have to provide their signature and date of birth when applying for a postal vote and also when casting their postal vote. Both records are checked against the information provided on the electoral register. If the Returning Officer is not satisfied that they match, the ballot paper is not counted.

Who is responsible for putting in place plans to deal with electoral fraud?

The primary responsibility lies with the Chief Electoral Officer who works closely with the police.

[Guidance on policing elections](#) has been published to support police officers and SPOCs as they put in place plans to prevent and detect electoral fraud in England and Wales. This guidance, which builds on work previously carried out by the Electoral Commission and the National Police Chiefs Council, now forms part of the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice for police forces in England and Wales.

Voters

Registering to vote

Who can vote in the UKPGE?

A person can register to vote in the UKPGE if they are:

- aged 18 or over on polling day
- a British citizen resident in the UK
- an Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen resident in the UK

British citizens living overseas who were registered to vote in the UK within the last 15 years can register as overseas electors and vote in the UKPGE. Service voters stationed abroad can also register and vote.

What is the registration deadline?

The deadline to apply to register is **Tuesday 26 November**.

How can someone register to vote?

Voters can register to vote online at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. People can still apply by completing a paper registration form if they prefer. They can [contact the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland for forms or download them from their website](#).

What are deadline for applying to vote by post or by proxy?

Applying for a post vote and a proxy vote – **5pm, Thursday 21 November**

To apply for a postal or proxy vote, voters should visit the [Electoral Office for Northern Ireland's \(EONI\) website](#) to download and complete the relevant application form and return it to EONI.

Can someone register at two different addresses?

You can be registered to vote at two different addresses in Northern Ireland, however you can only vote in one place in a UKPGE. It is an offence to vote twice in a UKPGE. It is for the Chief Electoral Officer to determine whether someone is eligible to register.

How do members of the armed services register and vote?

Service personnel and their spouses or civil partners, serving in the UK or overseas, can register either at their home address or their barracks in the usual way, 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.

Can prisoners vote?

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

In some limited circumstances, prisoners released on temporary licence may meet the criteria to register to vote.

The voting process

When will polling stations be open?

All polling stations open at 7am and close at 10pm.

What happens if someone is in a queue to enter a polling station at 10pm?

Any voter who arrives at their polling station and is in a queue waiting to vote at 10pm will be able to vote.

What voting system is used in these elections and how do you vote?

At the UKPGE, the first-past-the-post electoral system is used.

Voters should mark their ballot paper with a single 'X' in the box next to the candidate they wish to represent their constituency in the House of Commons.

Voting in person

Registered voters can visit their local polling station between **7am and 10pm on Thursday 12 December** to cast their vote.

- Before polling day, voters will be sent a poll card which includes details of where their polling station is
- Voters can only vote at the polling station specified on this card
- Polling station staff will be on hand to explain the ballot paper and how to vote
- Voters do not need to take their poll card with them to the polling station but doing so will speed up the process

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 or Irish 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.

Voting by post

If voters are unable to go to a polling station (for example if they are ill or away on holiday) then they may apply for a postal vote. To vote by post, registered electors need to apply for a postal vote before **5pm on Thursday 21 November**.

- Postal ballot papers will be sent directly to voters about a week before polling day
- Voters should complete their ballot paper and send it back straight away, so it arrives before **10pm on Thursday 12 December**
- Votes arriving after **10pm on Thursday 12 December** will not be counted.
- Voters must also remember to complete the postal voting statement with their signature and date of birth, or their vote will not be counted

Voting by proxy

Voters can also apply for a 'proxy vote' if they are unable to go to a polling station. This means they ask someone they trust to vote on their behalf for the candidate they wish to vote for. Applications forms to appoint a proxy must be returned to the EONI by **5pm, Thursday 21 November 2019**.

What provisions are made to make voting more accessible to voters with disabilities?

The Returning Officer should take all necessary steps to ensure that polling stations are laid out with the voter in mind. In particular, the needs of voters with a range of disabilities should be taken into account. The positioning of all of the required polling station furniture and equipment, as well as the positioning of notices, should also be considered, along with the placement of signage within the polling station and external signage.

It is a legal requirement to provide a tactile voting device at every polling station. This allows someone who is blind or partially sighted to mark the ballot paper themselves, once the details on the ballot paper have been read out either by their companion or the member of staff in charge of the polling station (the Presiding Officer). In addition, a large print version of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station for the assistance of voters who are partially sighted. Enlarged hand-held copies, marked as 'sample', must also be available to anyone who requires them.

The Commission works closely with the Accessibility of Elections Group, run by the Cabinet Office, to consider how voting can be made more accessible. [The Commission has responded to a UK Government Call for Evidence with recommendations on how elections can be made more accessible.](#)

The UK Government's response to the Call for Evidence was published in August 2018. It lists key findings and actions to be taken to improve the accessibility of future elections.

Is it mandatory to use pencils in polling stations? Can a pen be used?

There is nothing in law which states whether a pen or a pencil should be used to mark a ballot paper. Pencils have been used to mark ballot papers for practical reasons: for example, with ink pens there is a chance the ink may dry or spill. Also, ink may cause the mark which the voter has made to transfer when the ballot paper is folded, which could lead to the ballot paper being rejected. Should a voter wish to, they are able to use a pen to mark their ballot paper.

Can voters take selfies or other photos in the polling station?

The law relating to obtaining information in polling stations and disclosing such information is complex. Given the risk that someone taking a photo inside a polling station may be in breach of the law, whether intentionally or not, our advice is against taking any photos inside polling stations.

Is it ok for someone to take a picture of their postal ballot and post it on social media showing how they have voted?

Postal ballot papers are treated differently in electoral law, compared to polling station ballot papers. A postal voter may take a picture of their own postal ballot paper and publicise it (including via social media).

However, while the postal voter themselves may publicise the information, if someone else persuades or induces them to make this information available, they would be committing an offence. If there are any suggestions or allegations that this could be happening, the matter should be reported to the police.

Raising awareness of voter registration

What is the Electoral Commission doing to encourage people to register to vote?

The Commission's public awareness campaign to encourage voter registration runs until the registration deadline on Tuesday 26 November. Advertising will take place on Video-on-demand, TV, outdoors, online search and social channels. This is supported by PR activity. The Commission is also sharing resources for partners to use as part of their public engagement work.

How can other organisations help encourage people to register to vote?

As at all recent elections, the Commission is working with a range of partner organisations – from the corporate, public and third sectors – to try to reach traditionally under-registered voters and encourage them to register to vote. Any organisation that would like to promote these messages should visit the [‘I am a voter’ section of the Electoral Commission’s website](#), where they can also sign up for our voter registration newsletter, ‘Roll Call’.

Count events

The count and the declaration of the results

Who is responsible for the count?

The Chief Electoral Officer and has overall responsibility for the counting of the votes. This includes ensuring Presiding Officers transport ballot boxes from polling stations to the count venue in a secure and timely manner; and that those recruited to count ballot papers have been well trained in how to carry out their duties.

When will counts start?

The DRO must take reasonable steps to begin counting the votes given on the ballot papers as soon as practicable within four hours after the close of the poll. Polls close at 10pm.

How will I know when the results will be declared in different areas?

The EONI will be able to provide projected count times.

Who can attend the count?

The following people are entitled by law to attend the count:

- the DRO and their staff
- candidates and one guest
- election agents (or a sub agent on their behalf)
- counting agents
- Electoral Commission representatives
- accredited observers
- any other person permitted to attend by the Chief Electoral Officer

Members of the media and photographers who want to attend a count must obtain media accreditation in advance by completing the [online accreditation form on EONI's website](#).

How are the votes counted and the results announced?

1. **Receipt of ballot boxes:** postal ballot boxes and ballot boxes from the polling stations arrive at the count venue
2. **Verification:**

- a. Staff count the postal ballot papers and verify that the number of ballot papers in postal ballot boxes matches the numbers recorded by the DRO
 - b. Staff also count the ballot papers from each polling station. They verify that the number of ballot papers matches the number of papers issued, as recorded on the Presiding Officer's ballot paper accounts
 - c. The DRO produces a statement showing how many ballot papers have been received against how many ballot papers were expected
- 3. Counting the votes**
- a. Staff sort ballot papers by candidate
 - b. Staff then count the number of votes cast for each candidate
 - c. The DRO will share the provisional result with candidates and their agents. At this point, a candidate or their agent can ask for a recount of the votes. The DRO can refuse the request if they think it's unreasonable
- 4. Declaring the result:** The DRO will declare the number of votes cast for each candidate and will then announce the name of the candidate with the most votes as the elected Member of Parliament for the constituency

What happens with spoilt ballot papers?

Once the verification phase of the count is complete, ballot papers will be sorted by candidate and any doubtful ballot papers will be identified. The DRO will adjudicate any doubtful ballot papers in the presence of candidates and agents and the Commission has provided guidance to help them do this.

The DRO will announce how many ballot papers were rejected when they announce the results of the election.

Any ballot papers which are considered 'good' in this process are returned and allocated to the relevant candidate.

How does the opening of postal votes fit into this process?

It is likely that several postal vote opening sessions will take place before polling day, as well as on polling day itself.

The Returning Officer must give candidates at least 48 hours' notice of when and where the sessions will take place. At each opening session, the Returning Officer or their representative will decide whether or not the date of birth and signatures provided by electors on their postal voting statements match the signature and date of birth previously provided and held on record. If they are not satisfied that they match, the vote is rejected.

Candidates can observe the process or appoint a postal voting agent to do so. Ballot papers are handled 'face down' at postal vote opening sessions. Anyone attending an opening session must not attempt to look at identifying marks or numbers on ballot papers, disclose how any particular ballot paper has been marked or pass on any such information gained from the session.

All valid ballot papers are placed into ballot boxes and stored securely before being delivered to the count venue for counting after the close of poll.

Can the result be challenged after it has been announced?

Someone can challenge the result of an election by issuing an election petition. This is a legal action and will be adjudicated by a judge in court.

A petition at a UKPGE election must normally be presented within 21 calendar days after the day on which the election was held. Further time may be allowed in certain circumstances.

[The Law Commissions published a joint interim report](#) on 4 February 2016 recommending that the process for challenging elections should be modernised, making it easier for parties to understand and use, and that judges be given the power, in appropriate cases, to limit the potential costs for challengers. This is supported by the Electoral Commission.

For more information challenging the result of an election, see [Part 6 of our Guidance for candidates and agents](#).