

Overview

Overview of names, descriptions and emblems

This document is for people who are thinking about registering their party, or for already registered political parties who want to know more about party names, descriptions and emblems

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

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Terms and expressions we use

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific legal or regulatory requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal requirements.

You do not have to follow this guidance, but if you do, you will normally be doing enough to comply with the law.

Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service.

Wherever possible, we use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance. And we regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair.

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. [Find out more about our approach to enforcement.](#)

Overview of party names, descriptions and emblems

This document explains:

The rules on what names, descriptions and emblems a party can register for use on ballot papers. We refer to these as a party's 'identity marks'.

This document covers:

- what are a party's identity marks
- how will a parties name or description appear on ballot papers at different elections
- how do we assess identity marks
- issues to consider when choosing an emblem
- protecting names, descriptions and emblems

Related documents:

- [Introduction to registering a political party](#)
- [Overview of maintaining party details](#)
- [Process for registering a political party](#)
- [PEF Online: Getting started](#)
- [Introduction to being a party treasurer](#)

You can find all our guidance on our [website](#).

Summary

A Party's name, descriptions and emblems (identity marks) play an important role in the election process.

If a party wants their identity marks to appear on ballot papers at an election, they must be registered with the Electoral Commission.

Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), there are statutory tests that party identity marks must meet in order to be registered.

This guidance explains what these tests are and how they can be met.

Introduction

A party's identity marks (name, descriptions and emblems) play an important part in the election process. Their main role is to help voters find a party or candidate on election ballot papers.

If a party wants their identity marks to appear on ballot papers they must apply and be registered with the Electoral Commission (the Commission). There is an application process to register a party and their identity marks with us. This guidance explains the statutory tests that we apply in relation to identity marks.

The rules for each election set out what identity marks can appear on ballot papers. These rules are intended to provide clarity and transparency for the voter. Most importantly, ballot papers must be clear and easy for voters to use. You should check with your local Returning Officer to verify what you can and cannot use for each election.

On [our website](#) you can search for a council election office by your postcode or local authority. The election office will be able to let you know the Returning Officer for the election that you are interested in.

What are a party's identity marks?

A party's identity marks are their name, descriptions and emblems that are registered with the Commission.

Party name

A party's name is the registered name of a party which is registered with the Commission and can be used on ballot papers. A registered party must have a name. We do not regulate how a party wishes to brand itself when that message does not appear on ballot papers

If a party does not register with us, they will not be able to contest an election using that name on ballot papers.

If your party is not registered with us a candidate can apply to the Returning Officer to have:

- the word 'Independent' (or 'Annibynol' if standing in Wales) appearing next to their name on ballot papers, or
- no identity mark on ballot papers

This is along with any other details required by the relevant election rules.

[Find more information for candidates and agents.](#)

Party descriptions

A party description is an optional identity mark that you can register in addition to the party name. A voter must be able to identify your party from the description. For example, a way to do that may be to include the party name in the description. If in the Commission's opinion, a voter cannot identify the party from the description, it is not a description under PPERA and cannot be registered.

A description cannot be exactly the same as the party name.

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You can register up to 12 descriptions with us. If you choose not to register a description, your party candidates can use the registered name of your party on the ballot paper along with their name or emblem.

You do not have to register with us any messages that you intend to use in your campaign. You only need to register any description that you intend to use on ballot papers.

A description can, depending on the specific election, be used as an alternative to the party's name or in addition to the party's name on the ballot paper. In addition you can also register a joint description with another party.

Joint party descriptions

Registered parties can also choose to share and jointly register a party description. This is called a 'joint description' and can be used by all the parties that have registered it, on ballot papers. This allows parties to stand joint candidates.

There are rules regarding the registration of joint descriptions:

- you can only share and jointly register one joint description with another party or parties
- the wording of the joint description must identify all of the applicant parties to be capable of being a joint description
- joint descriptions do not count towards the maximum of 12 descriptions that you can register with us

When using a joint description the candidate will need to choose which of the party emblems that they wish to use on ballot papers. You cannot register a joint emblem and instead can only use an emblem registered to any of the parties who have registered the joint description.

If you are thinking of registering a joint description, please contact us first for advice.

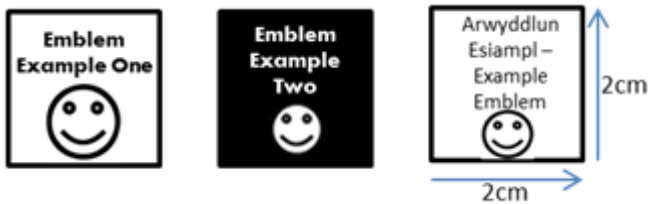
Party emblems

A party emblem is an optional visual representation (or logo) of a party.


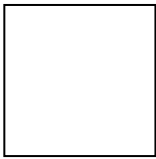
You do not need to register an emblem if you only wish to use it on campaign material and not on ballot papers.

Along with other identity marks, an emblem can help voters identify the party on ballot papers. A party can register up to three emblems. Your party and its candidates will be able to choose to use one of your emblems on ballot papers at all elections.

For example:



The example below shows a ballot paper that allows either a name or description and an emblem to be used:

Last name, First name (address in the Constituency)	Example One 	
Example party name		
Candidate name Candidate address Party name or description	Party emblem	Area for voter's mark

How will a party's name or description appear on ballot papers at different elections?

At most elections in the UK a candidate can choose to stand using either the registered name or a registered description. However at other elections a party must use the registered party name, but may also use the registered description alongside it.

At a regional contest in a Scottish Parliamentary election a party **must** use their registered name and can also **choose** to use a registered description on ballot papers.

At a constituency contest in a Scottish Parliamentary election, a candidate can only stand for election using their registered party's name. At either a constituency or regional contest in a Scottish Parliamentary election they can add the word 'Scottish' before their name.

At all other elections throughout the UK parties can use **either** the party name **or** a party description on ballot papers.

Parish and community council elections

At parish and community council elections party and independent candidates can, at the discretion of the Returning Officer, use a description not registered with us. As long as the description does not exceed six words in length and cannot be confused with a registered political party. [Find guidance for candidates and agents.](#)

Choosing your identity marks (name, descriptions and emblems)

Before you start the application process for registering a new party or changing your identity marks, you should think carefully about what you want your identity marks to be. You may find our [‘Process for registering a political party’](#) helpful as it outlines the application process.

To help you make your decision, you should [search the registers](#) to determine if there are any similar identity marks on the register. If your proposed identity marks are likely to result in voters confusing them with those of another registered party we will not register them. Searching the registers will also give you a good idea of what identity marks meet the statutory tests.

You should also undertake a search of the internet to see if there are any existing groups or organisations which have a name or logo which is the same as, or similar to, the identity marks that you want to apply to register. We cannot register an identity mark that is likely to result in a voter being misled.

Your identity marks should provide voters with a clear understanding and recognition of who you are. The more distinct your party identifiers are, the easier it is for voters to find you on ballot papers.

How do we assess identity marks?

The law requires that we apply tests to all applications to register party names, descriptions and emblems (identity marks). As a guide, we cannot register any identity mark that in the Commission's opinion:

- is likely to mislead voters as to the effect of their vote
- is the same as another registered identity mark which is on the same register
- is the same as an identity mark from a deregistered party which was on the same register and is protected
- is likely to result in voters confusing it with another party identity mark that is already registered or protected
- is likely to contradict or hinder instructions or guidance given for voting
- is obscene or offensive
- contains certain prohibited words
- is, or contains an acronym or abbreviation that is not well known and widely used and not spelt out
- links in any way to online material or contains reference to online content
- contains a reference to a person's name unless it is a person directly associated with your party
- an emblem that contains text which cannot be read at the size emblems appear on ballot papers (2cm square)
- contains more than six words
- is not in Roman script
- is likely to amount to an offence if published

When assessing an application we give consideration to how the proposed identity marks can be used on ballot papers before making a decision in accordance with the statutory tests.

We assess how the proposed name, descriptions and emblems interact with each other as a whole.

We also take into account the different ways in which they can be used on the ballot paper at different elections.

If an identity mark does not meet the statutory tests it will be rejected.

It is your responsibility to determine the details of your application and to ensure that your application complies with the requirements of PPERA. Until a final decision is taken on your application, we cannot confirm whether it will be successful. We will notify you of our reasons if we refuse your application.

What does 'likely to mislead voters' mean?

This test looks at whether in our opinion a party identity mark would be likely to lead a voter to either vote in a way they did not intend (e.g. for a party other than their preferred party) or to otherwise mark the ballot paper in a way which was not their intention.

You should undertake a search of the internet to see if there are any existing groups or organisations which have a name or logo which is the same as, or similar to, the identity marks that you want to apply to register. We cannot register an identity mark if, in the Commission's opinion, it is likely to result in a voter believing they are voting for an organisation that is not the party or connected to the party.

We are also required to consider whether an identity mark would contradict instructions or guidance for voting (e.g. 'tick here'). We will reject an identity mark if, in our opinion, we believe a voter would likely make a mistake on the ballot which would invalidate their vote, for example by voting for too many candidates.

How do we assess whether something is likely to ‘confuse’ voters?

We are required to make sure that a voter can distinguish the difference between identity marks from different parties. This test looks at whether, in our opinion, a voter would confuse the identity mark of a party with another party’s identity mark which is already registered.

Our assessment of whether an identity mark is confusing will normally take into account whether the identity mark is visually the same (e.g. the words ‘stationary’ or ‘stationery’, similar images of boats) or contextually the same (e.g. ‘Party of the Oak’ and ‘The Oak Party’).

For emblems we will consider whether the designed elements and text are different from other identity marks.

How do we assess whether something is ‘obscene’ or ‘offensive’?

We assess all applications on a case by case basis but we are likely to reject an identity mark (on grounds of obscenity or offensiveness) if in our opinion it, for example:

- contains offensive language or terminology
- links to something generally accepted to be offensive with a relevant group of people

In making our assessment on obscenity or offensiveness we take into account that parties must be able to express their political views alongside the fact that, in order to exercise their right to vote, a voter must use a ballot paper. We will also consider the context and circumstances in which any identity mark can be used.

Words that cannot be used in identity marks

The law identifies some words that cannot be used on a ballot paper. In addition, some words cannot be used on ballot papers without being qualified by other words. The law applies to the plural or singular of the prohibited words, as well as the prohibited words written in another language.

These words are split into four categories.

Category 1 prohibited words are:

Duke, Duchess, Her Majesty, His Majesty, King, Prince, Princess, Queen, Royal, Royalty

These words cannot be used in identity marks on their own. You can only use category 1 words in conjunction with the name of a place, institution or local government area.

For example you cannot use '**Royal Forever Party**' because '**Royal**' is not being used with the name of a place, institution or local government area.

You could use '**Royal Tunbridge Wells Party**' because '**Royal**' is being used in conjunction with a place.

Category 2 prohibited words are:

Britain, British, England, English, National, Scotland, Scots, Scottish, United Kingdom, Wales, Welsh

These words cannot be used in identity marks on their own. You can only use category 2 words if you use them with another word or expression other than the name or description of a party already registered in the relevant part of the UK.

For example you cannot register '**English One Big Party**' if there was an already registered '**One Big Party**', because 'English' is being used with the name of an existing registered party.

Category 3 prohibited words are: Independent, Official, Unofficial

These words cannot be used in identity marks on their own. You can only use category 3 words if the word is used with another word or expression, but not:

- an existing registered name or description; or
- only with the word 'party'; or
- another category 3 word

For example you cannot use the '**Independent Stop the Bypass Party**' if there was an already registered '**Stop the Bypass Party**' because 'Independent' is being used with the name of an existing registered party.

You cannot register the '**Independent Party**'.

Category 4 prohibited words are: Ratepayers, Residents, Tenants

These words cannot be used in identity marks on their own. You can only use category 4 words in conjunction with the name of a local government or geographical area. For example you can register '**Residents of York Party**' because '**Residents**' has been used in conjunction with 'York', a geographical area.

You cannot register '**Residents Action Group**' or '**Residents Unite**' because '**Residents**' is not being used with the name of a local government or geographical area.

What expressions can't I use?

The law identifies expressions that cannot be used on ballot papers. You cannot register the expression '**None of the above**' as an identity mark, either in isolation or in conjunction with other words or expressions. Party identity marks similar to this expression are also likely to be rejected as misleading.

Can acronyms and abbreviations be used?

If an acronym or abbreviation is not well-known or widely-used in everyday language, it will not normally be permitted for your party identity mark. Examples of well-known acronyms used in common language include 'UK', 'EU' and 'NHS'.

We will consider certain well-known and widely-used acronyms such as those set out above as one word.

If in the Commission's opinion an acronym is not well-known and widely-used, the words it is intended to represent must be spelled out and written in lower case. The acronym can then be added next to this, and each word, including the acronym will count towards the overall six-word limit.

Words within a party identity mark can have initial capital letters.

Can numerals be used?

If your party identity mark either starts or ends with a numeral, we are unlikely to approve it for registration in that form. Instead, we will ask you to spell it out as a word rather than use a numeral.

This is because at some elections voters are asked to rank candidates by order of preference using digits. Party identity marks that start or end with a numeral risk being misleading with the numbers on the ballot paper and the instructions on how to vote.

We may register a party identity mark that uses numerals in the middle of the name, depending on how they are used and whether it is likely to mislead voters.

Can links to online material be used?

Your party may use a website or social media to communicate with voters. However, websites or social media links (e.g. Twitter hashtags or Facebook pages) should not be used as part of your identity marks.

In assessing your identity mark, we must determine whether it meets the statutory tests. If your identity mark links to online material we are likely to refuse it as we are unable to assess material that has potential to change over time against the statutory tests.

Can an individual's name be used?

Although we consider each case on its merits, we will not generally accept the use of an individual's name in an identity mark.

This is because instructions on ballot papers often state that the ballot paper is for the election of a candidate to a specific constituency/ward or other area. If a person's name, other than one of the candidates, appears on ballot papers for any given area it risks contradicting the instructions for voting.

We are required to refuse any identity mark that contradicts, or hinders an elector's understanding of, directions for their guidance in voting given on the ballot paper or elsewhere.

What languages can I use in party identity marks?

You can apply to use a language other than English in your identity marks for use on ballot papers.

For example, you may want to register your party identity mark in English and Welsh (for the Great Britain register) or English and Irish (for the Northern Ireland register).

In Wales if you have registered your party identity mark in both Welsh and English you can choose to display both of these on ballot papers.

For elections in other parts of the UK the party name can only appear in one language on the ballot paper. The English translation of the name will appear on the public register.

This means that you will be able to choose the most appropriate language for your party's identity mark to appear on ballot papers.

The proposed identity mark in each language cannot be longer than six words.

If you want to register a party identity mark in a language other than English, you must provide an accurate English translation as part of your application. All translations are verified for accuracy. If your translation is incorrect we will ask you to change it and if there is a more accurate or better translation we will request that you to alter your translation.

A party name and any descriptions must be in Roman Script, even if it is registered in a language other than English. It is likely to be acceptable if you can use a UK based keyboard to produce the identity mark without using special characters.

Issues to consider when choosing an emblem

What is an emblem?

An emblem should contain one or more the following common elements:

- a designed element
- a distinctive badge or device
- a visible object, symbol or representation

We are normally unlikely to register an emblem that contains only text.

You must consider the following when designing your emblem:


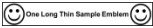




- you must portray your emblem in black and white
- you must avoid emblems that are the same as other party names or descriptions, we are likely to refuse emblems that are similar to another party's name or descriptions
- you must not use crosses or ticks
- you must design an emblem that complies with the points set out on page 10 of this document

Practical considerations when designing your emblem

When designing your emblem you should consider the following:

- That the text in the emblem is readable when your emblem is resized to 2cm square
- Whether the emblem makes good use of the available space. Long thin banner emblems, as shown in the example on the next page, are often unreadable

Examples of the above issues:

Issue and example	How it appears on ballot papers
<p>This is an example of a long wide emblem</p> 	
<p>This is an example of an illegible emblem (text too small)</p> 	
<p>This is an example of an illegible example (fuzzy)</p> 	

What size will an emblem be on the ballot paper?

The space allowed for an emblem when printed on a ballot paper is 2cm square. When reviewing your proposed emblems, we will consider how they will appear when reduced to ballot paper size.

The minimum size that text must be in emblems

So that voters are able to read any words in emblems we require that there is a minimum size for text used in emblems. If an emblem does not meet these standards it will be likely to be refused.

This will mean that we will check that a letter 'x' in the chosen font used in the emblem is not less than 1.2mm. The table below shows the minimum size text in common fonts.

Examples of the minimum size of text in common fonts

Font type and size	Actual size of text
Times New Roman 7.5	x in Times New Roman 7.5 Font
Arial 6.5	x in Arial 6.5 Font
Verdana 6.5	x in Verdana 6.5 Font

In our assessment as to whether the text size is readable we will also take into account how the text is displayed in the emblem, how it is formatted, as well as the resolution quality of the overall emblem.

If your emblem doesn't meet these standards it is likely it will be rejected.

Providing us with black and white emblems

Emblems that appear on the register and ballot papers must be black and white. You must give us a black and white version of your emblem.

Any emblem that is submitted in colour will be rejected and you will need to resubmit it in black and white.

Submitting your emblems

The emblems you submit must be in black and white and should:

- be 5cm square
- be high quality resolution – at least 300dpi or higher
- be 'jpeg' or 'gif' format

What if I haven't got emblems in an electronic format?

If you do not have your emblems in an electronic format, you can send us the original artwork. For example, you may have drawn your emblems by hand, and you don't have access to a computer to scan them yourself.

The emblems that you provide must be in black and white (monochrome) and:

- fit in a 5cm square frame (do not put a frame around the emblems, unless it is part of the design)
- be high quality, so each emblem is clear and sharp

We will scan your emblems for you (in black and white) so that they can be used on ballot papers and displayed correctly on the register. If your emblems are larger than 5cm square, we will reduce them when we scan them.

We cannot guarantee the quality of emblems that we have to resize or emblems that we have to scan.

We strongly recommend that you provide your emblems by PEF online.

Protecting names, descriptions and emblems

Parties can choose to register on the Great Britain or Northern Ireland registers, or both. We cannot register an identity mark that is the same as that of another party in the same register (Great Britain or Northern Ireland).

In Great Britain, parties can choose which part or parts of Great Britain they want to register in (England, Scotland and Wales). We cannot register an identity mark that, in the Commission's opinion, is likely to result in voters confusing it with another party identity mark which is registered in the same part of the register.

The same test applies to the Northern Ireland register as a whole.

After deregistration a party's identity marks are protected for a period of time.

If the party was voluntarily deregistered and its income/expenditure for the party's financial year before deregistration was £25,000 or more, then its identity marks will be protected until the end of the financial year of the party which follows that in which it was deregistered. In all other cases, the party's identity marks will be protected until the end of the financial year in which it was deregistered. Registration does not protect your identity marks from being used by others elsewhere other than on a ballot paper. For instance, it does not stop other people using your identity marks in their campaign material if they want to.

If you want to prevent people from doing this, you should get independent legal advice on other ways of protecting your intellectual property rights.

Copyright and trademarks

We do not make any checks for infringement of intellectual property rights when we register a party's identity marks. So, before you apply, you should make sure that your identity marks are not breaching any copyright and trademark laws.

If you register your party's identity marks, then discover that they are infringing copyright or trademark, you could be subject to legal challenge by the registered owner.

For more information, please [visit the Government's Intellectual Property Office website](#).

Where can I get further advice?

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can [view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website](#).

You can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below.

Contact us on:

England: 0333 103 1928
partyreg@electoralcommission.org.uk

Scotland: 0333 103 1928
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales: 0333 103 1929
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

Northern Ireland: 0333 103 1928
infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Visit us at <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk>

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at:
partyreg@electoralcommission.org.uk.