

Y
Comisiwn
Etholiadol

The
Electoral
Commission

Supporting qualifying foreign citizens to vote in Wales

Facilitator Guide

Introduction

There are local government elections taking place in Wales on the 5th May 2022. To vote in this election, you must be registered to vote by the 14th April 2022.

This guide has been created to support you, as someone who works with qualifying foreign citizens, to provide information to the people you work with so they can feel confident to take part in Welsh elections and know that their vote matters.

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. We have designed this guide to reflect our organisation's values of impartiality and independence.

Further resources

- [Accompanying PowerPoint slides](#)
- [Promotional materials to encourage registration](#)
- [FAQ for qualifying foreign nationals in multiple languages](#)

Elections in Wales

Who can vote in Welsh elections?

In January 2020, the Senedd passed a new law that means if you are over 16 and a resident in Wales, you can vote in Senedd elections, regardless of where you were born. In 2021 this law was extended to local government elections.

The extension to voting rights means that qualifying foreign citizens in Wales can now vote in Senedd and local government elections. A qualifying foreign citizen is someone that has permission to enter or stay in the UK, or who does not need such permission. EU and qualifying Commonwealth citizens can already vote in Senedd and Local Government elections.

If voters are unsure whether they qualify they can contact their local electoral registration team, find their contact details by [entering your postcode on our website](#).

More information about who can vote in elections in Wales is available on our [website](#).

Senedd (Welsh Parliament) elections

What does the Senedd do?

The Senedd makes laws in a number of areas, including health, education, training, housing, tourism, economic development and tax.

Its other functions include debating important issues, conducting inquiries and holding the Welsh Government to account.

Who represents you in the Senedd?

The people who represent you in the Senedd are called Members of the Senedd, or MSs for short. There are 60 elected MSs and every person in Wales is represented by five of them.

Each MS looks after a particular geographic area in Wales. One of your MSs represents your Senedd constituency and the other four represent a much bigger area called a region. The five regions in Wales are North Wales, Mid and West Wales, South Wales East, South Wales Central and South Wales West.

Your MSs divide their time between work at the Senedd in Cardiff and local work in the area they represent. You elect your MSs every five years.

Your MSs might:

- debate and pass laws which affect Wales

- make decisions about taxes ask questions and look closely at Welsh Government policies to hold them to account
- respond to a problem in your area by asking the responsible politician, known as a minister, an official question
- hold a regular open meeting with people in their area to discuss the problems in your area.
- sit on Senedd committees to look at issues in more detail
- influence how schools and hospitals are run in Wales.

You can contact any of the MSs who represent you to ask questions about issues that are important to you. You can find their contact details on the [Senedd website](#) and watch debates and Committee meetings on [Senedd TV](#).

Local government elections

What do local councils do?

Local councils (sometimes called local government or local authorities) make decisions about local issues that affect you on a daily basis. Councils are responsible for local services including:

- education services
- youth and leisure facilities
- social housing
- managing parks and other public places
- social services such as foster care, help for people with disabilities, or care for the elderly
- local roads and footpaths
- rubbish and recycling
- libraries
- registering voters and running elections

Who represents you in your local council?

The people elected to represent you in your council are called councillors. The geographic area covered by your council is divided into smaller areas called wards. Your ward could be represented by up to five councillors.

You can contact any of the councillors who represent you, and you'll usually find their contact details on your council's website. You can find your local council [here](#).

UK Parliament elections

You must be a 18 or over and a British, Irish or qualifying Commonwealth citizen to vote in UK Parliament elections.

The UK Parliament makes some decisions that affect Wales. These are called 'reserved matters' and include things like defence, foreign affairs, immigration and anything to do with the monarchy. The UK Parliament is made up of two chambers – the House of Commons and the House of Lords. The public vote for the people who sit in the House of Commons.

The UK Parliament makes decisions about how the UK is run and makes laws that affect everyone's lives. Its roles include:

- providing the funds to do government work by voting for tax
- protecting the public and the rights of individuals
- looking closely at government policy and actions - this is known as scrutinising debating the major issues of the day.

The person who represents you in the House of Commons is called a Member of Parliament, or MP for short.

As with MSs, you can contact your MP to ask them questions. You can find out how to get in touch by visiting the UK Parliament's [website](#).

Campaigning

What is campaigning?

Political campaigning is where political parties and their candidates try to persuade you to vote for them. Campaigning is a really important and useful part of helping you choose who to vote for.

For all elections, you should choose the candidate that you feel would be the best person to represent you. They might share your views or prioritise issues that you think are important.

To help decide who to vote for, you should research the candidates standing for election in your local area and what they are standing for. The list of candidates standing at an election is usually available on the council website a couple of weeks before the election.

Types of campaigning

- **Newspaper stories and interviews with candidates:** many newspapers publicly support one of the main political parties. This means you may see a newspaper publishing more positive stories about one political party than any other. Journalists who work in TV and radio are not allowed to encourage voters to vote a certain way. They are asked to give an independent view of elections and campaigns.
- **Posters and billboards in your local area:** supporters of political parties and their members might also put small posters in their windows or placards in their front gardens to show their support.
- **Party election broadcasts:** in the UK, political parties are not allowed to advertise on TV. Instead, the main political parties are given a set amount of time on TV to put their policies to voters.
- **Canvassing:** candidates might knock on your door, or may have a stand on your high street. This is called canvassing. You can ask candidates and their teams questions about issues that are important to you.
- **Hustings:** candidates might take part in public debates with other candidates in your area. These are called hustings. They usually take place in a local community building and you're free to go along. Hustings are often advertised in local newspapers and on community Facebook groups.
- **Manifestos:** ahead of Senedd and UK General elections, political parties will publish a document outlining all of their policies and priorities called a manifesto. They will be available on political parties' websites.

Registering to vote

You must register to vote by midnight on the 14th April to vote in the local government election on the 5th May.

How to register

You must be registered to vote in elections. Once you're registered, you don't need to register again before each election. You only need to register to vote again if:

- you move house
- you change your name for any reason.

Registering to vote online is the easiest and quickest way. It only takes five minutes, and all you need is your national insurance number and date of birth;

www.gov.uk/register tovote.

If you're unable to register online, you can register by post by [downloading this form](#).

If you don't have a National Insurance Number, you need to state this on your registration application then continue to submit it. Your Electoral Registration Officer will then contact you to ask you to provide documentary evidence to prove your identity.

The electoral register

Once you've registered, you'll appear on the electoral register. This is a list of everyone in your area who is registered to vote. These lists are managed by your local electoral registration office. If you have any questions about the electoral register, you should contact them; they will be happy to help. You can find their contact details on [our website](#).

There are two types of electoral register. The full register includes the name and address of everyone registered in the area, except those who have registered anonymously. This list is only used for:

- electoral purposes, such as issuing poll cards
- detecting crime
- calling people for jury service
- checking credit applications.

Candidates, registered political parties and other registered campaigners are also allowed to have copies of the full electoral register. They can use the register for campaigning activities, including sending election communication to voters. The open register is an extract of the full electoral register. This version is available to anyone who wants to buy it, such as businesses or charities. You can opt out of appearing on the open register.

Voting in Welsh elections

Your vote

In all elections in Wales, your vote belongs to you. You can decide whether or not you want to vote and who you want to vote for. Whether you vote at a polling station, by post, or via a proxy, it's your decision. It's illegal for anyone to influence you to vote a certain way against your will.

There are three different ways you can vote, but **you need to register to be able to vote on polling day.**

1. At the polling station

The place you go to vote is called your 'polling station'. It's usually a public building like a nearby school or village hall. Before the day of the election you'll receive a card, called a poll card which tells you where your polling station is. Polling stations are open from 7am until 10pm. As long as you're in the queue to vote by 10pm, you'll be allowed to vote.

When you arrive at the polling station a member of staff will ask for your name and address. The staff member will give you your ballot papers. You will then be directed to take your ballot papers into a polling booth where you can fill out your ballot paper.

2. By post

If you know that you won't be able to get to your polling station on polling day, you might want to consider a postal vote. You need to register for a postal vote with your electoral registration office by the deadline for that election – but the sooner the better.

You can [download an application form](#) on our website. Or, you can ask your electoral registration office to send one to you.

3. Someone can vote on your behalf (voting by proxy)

You can also ask someone you trust to vote on your behalf. This is called a proxy vote and your trusted person is called your 'proxy'. You need to tell your proxy who you'd like to vote for and they need to go to your polling place to vote for you. This may be different from their own. If you choose to vote by proxy, you need to register for this no later than six days before polling day.

You can [download an application form](#) on our website. Or, you can ask your electoral registration office to send one to you.

Further information about voting in person, by post and by proxy is available on our [website](#).