

Referendum on the UK Parliamentary voting system: November 2010 campaigner update

The Government has proposed a referendum on the UK parliamentary voting system on 5 May 2011.

Parliament is considering the Bill enabling the referendum. The Bill also sets out how the referendum would be run, and makes changes to the rules that campaigners must follow.

We published initial guidance for campaigners in November 2010, and we will publish final guidance when the rules are confirmed.

We understand that campaigners may want to start planning before this, so this series of updates will highlight key points that may be helpful.

About this update

This update is based on the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill as passed by the House of Commons (the Bill). It is now being considered by the House of Lords.

Parliament may amend the Bill, so some of the information may change. We will highlight any changes in future updates.

We will publish updates at key stages in the parliamentary process. You can sign up to receive these updates by calling 020 7271 0616 or emailing pef@electoralcommission.org.uk.

This second update covers:

- Grant levels for lead campaign groups
- Timing of the referendum count: preferred option and invitation to comment
- The Electoral Commission's position on administrative preparedness for the spring elections and the referendum

- The Electoral Commission's plans for public awareness campaigns - Spring 2011

Grants for lead campaign groups

We can appoint a lead campaign group for each outcome in the referendum. Lead campaign groups have several benefits, including a higher spending limit and a publicly funded grant from us.

What are the grant levels?

The maximum grant we can give is £600,000 for each lead campaigner.

Earlier this year, we published a principles paper explaining our general approach to setting grant levels at referendums. This paper can be found at

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0004/87412/Referendum-Principles-Paper-2010-06-02-FINAL.pdf.

The key points are that grants will be set according to the length of the regulated referendum campaign period (which is normally between 10 weeks and 6 months), and should be available to cover the basic infrastructure costs of running a campaign, rather than to cover the cost of campaigning materials. This approach follows the recommendation of the Neill Committee report which gave rise to the provision for statutory grants to campaigners in PPERA.

Following these principles, we have now set the level of the grant for the proposed referendum at £70,000, plus £28,000 for every week of the referendum period, with a cap at the statutory maximum of £600,000. As

the referendum period is not due to begin until the Bill receives Royal Assent, we are not yet able to calculate the final grant value. We will do so, and issue a campaigner update, as soon as we are able to.

Please note that:

- The total grant figure will be rounded to the nearest £10,000
- 30% of the grant will be paid upfront when we designate lead campaign groups, with the rest paid when we receive evidence of a commitment to spend on eligible costs
- The overall cumulative amount claimable for staff costs will be limited to an amount calculated as the equivalent of £3,000 for every week of the referendum period. These costs have been set at a level to provide sufficient cover for administrative staff, but there will be no restrictions on the activities carried out by staff for whom the grant is claimed.
- Staff costs do not cover any travel expenses

What items may be claimed under the grant?

We will publish the formal terms and conditions for the grants shortly.

In the meantime, you may find the following list helpful as a general indication of the items that may be claimed under the grant:

- Office rental
- Utility charges

- Staff costs (subject to the points listed above)
- IT software and hardware costs (for standard office equipment only, not for specialised campaigning software)
- Administrative and overhead costs (for instance, telephone calls connected with campaign administration, but not the costs of contacting voters by telephone to campaign)
- Photocopier hire for office use (not equipment designed for large scale print runs)

This list is intended only as a guide; please contact us if you need further information before the terms and conditions are published.

Timing of the referendum count

As Chief Counting Officer for the proposed referendum, our Chair Jenny Watson has been considering the timing of the referendum count.

She is currently minded to direct counting to begin from 4pm on Friday 6 May, to enable the elections held on 5 May to be counted first. A paper setting out this preferred option, and the principles and assumptions which underpin it can be found at http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/word_doc/0014/106340/Count-timing-proposal-UK-Parliamentary-Voting-System-Referendum-November-2010.doc.

You are invited to comment on this issue so that a range of views can be

taken into account before a final decision is made. Please send your comments to Tom Hawthorn, Head of Electoral Policy, by email on thawthorn@electoralcommission.org.uk, or by post to Electoral Commission, Trevelyan House, 30 Great Peter Street, London, SW1P 2HW.

We will need to receive your response by 5pm on Thursday 25 November 2011.

Our position on administrative preparedness for the spring elections and referendums

When the Bill was published in July this year, we made clear our view that it should be possible to deliver the referendum on the same day as scheduled elections on 5 May 2011, if key practical risks are properly managed.

As we are now less than 6 months away from 5 May, we have issued the statement below on our view of the progress made so far.

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0015/106323/JW-Stakeholders-ToC-Readiness-AnnexA-2010-11-10-FINAL.pdf

Our plans for public awareness campaigns – Spring 2011

Our public awareness campaigns will provide information on the elections and referendum and how voters can take part in them. They will target all

eligible voters. The paper below provides further details about our plans for these campaigns,

http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0014/106322/Referendum-Campaigns-Update-Nov-2010.pdf

Where you can find more information

For advice and guidance

We are always happy to give prospective campaigners advice on how to comply with the rules.

Please contact us on 020 7271 0616, www.electoralcommission.org.uk or pef@electoralcommission.org.uk, or at:

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Join our update list

You can sign up to receive these updates by calling 020 7271 0616 or emailing pef@electoralcommission.org.uk.

For other information about the referendum

On our website, www.electoralcommission.org.uk, you can find:

- our guidance for referendum campaigners
- more information about our role in referendums
- our key principles for running referendums
- our approach to assessing referendum questions
- our findings on the referendum question
- briefings on the Bill explaining our position on provisions where appropriate