

Referendum on the UK Parliamentary voting system: January 2011 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 have published initial guidance for campaigners, and we will publish final guidance when the rules are confirmed.

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 update covers:

- The referendum timetable
- Thinking about being a lead campaign group?
- Accessing the electoral register
- Our public awareness plans for May 2011
- Our new address in London
- Useful links

The referendum timetable

You can find a provisional timetable for the referendum as an annex to this update.

This timetable includes the deadlines for registering to vote and for applying for postal or proxy votes. It assumes that the referendum will take place on 5 May as planned by the government.

When the timetable is confirmed, we will publish a final version in our specific guidance document for the referendum.

The final timetable will include the deadline for applying to us to be a lead campaign group. This date is not in the provisional timetable because it depends on when Parliament passes the Bill.

Thinking about being a lead campaign group?

We have now published a form for applications to be a lead campaign group. You can find it at http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0018/105651/doc-application-pvs-lc.pdf

If you are thinking of applying to be a lead campaign group, and haven't yet spoken to us, we'd like to hear from you so that we can explain the benefits of designation in more detail.

Accessing the electoral register

Our [second December update](#) explained some of the rules on use of the full electoral register by campaigners.

How to request copies

When we confirm that you will be added to our register as a campaigner, you can ask local electoral registration officers for copies of the register. We'll be able to provide a list of contact details for local electoral registration officers.

When asking for copies, we recommend that you:

- Use the form we will publish on our website. This will make sure that you are giving all the information that you need to.
- Ask for any updates to the register that will happen during the referendum campaign. This will make sure your information is up to date.

The format of the register

Copies of the register will be sent in data form, unless you ask for a paper copy.

The most common data format is CSV. Electoral registration officers only have to send the register in the format in which they hold it.

They do not have to supply it in any other data format.

Update on our public awareness plans

The Commission is planning a public awareness campaign ahead of the 5 May elections and the proposed referendum on the Parliamentary voting system. The centre piece of the campaign will be a public information booklet that we plan to deliver to every household in the UK. There will be separate booklets for England, Wales, Northern Ireland and Scotland to reflect the different elections taking place.

We have now published draft text that will form the basis of the core sections of the booklets.

You can find it on our website, together with information on how we developed the contents of the booklet and the anticipated dates for delivery:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/news-and-media/public-awareness-campaigns/public-information-on-5-May-2011-elections-and-proposed-referendum>

We have moved!

Our London office has now moved. Our telephone and fax numbers have not changed, but our new address is:

The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London
EC1Y 8YZ

Useful links for campaigners

You may find the following links to other organisations' websites helpful.

The Charity Commission

The Charity Commission has updated its guidance on campaigning to include referendums.

You can find it at:

http://www.charitycommission.gov.uk/Charity_requirements_guidance/Your_charitys_activities/Campaigning/elect.aspx

BBC guidelines

The BBC has published its draft guidance for the referendum.

You can find it at:

http://downloads.bbc.co.uk/guidelines/editorialguidelines/pdfs/AV_ReferendumGuidanceDRAFT.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.

For advice, or to sign up to receive these updates, please contact us on 020 7271 0616, or

pef@electoralcommission.org.uk, or at:

Party and Election Finance
The Electoral Commission
3 Bunhill Row
London
EC1Y 8YZ

You can also contact:

Scotland Office

38 Thistle Street
Edinburgh EH2 1EN
Tel: 0131 225 0200
Fax: 0131 225 0205
Textphone: 18001 0131 225 0200
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales Office

Caradog House
1-6 Saint Andrews Place
Cardiff CF10 3BE
Tel: 029 2034 6800
Fax: 029 2034 6805
Textphone: 18001 029 2034 6800
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

Northern Ireland Office

Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast BT2 8EN
Tel: 028 9089 4020
Fax: 028 9089 4026
Textphone: 18001 028 9089 4020
infonorthernireland@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

Appendix: Provisional timetable for a UK parliamentary voting system referendum on 5 May 2011

This timetable is based on the Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill as passed by the House of Commons. It is subject to change.

Event	Date (Deadline or last time the event can be done)
Publication of notice of referendum	Friday 25 March 2011
Deadline for receipt of absent vote applications in Northern Ireland	5pm on Monday 11 April 2011
Deadline for new postal vote applications and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes (Great Britain)	5pm on Thursday 14 April 2011
Deadline for new applications to be on the electoral register (England, Wales and Northern Ireland)	Thursday 14 April 2011
Deadline for new applications to be on the electoral register (Scotland)	Friday 15 April 2011
Deadline for new applications to vote by proxy (not postal proxy), except for medical emergencies (Great Britain)	5pm on Thursday 21 April 2011
Deadline for late absent vote applications on the grounds of unforeseen illness (Northern Ireland)	5pm on Thursday 21 April 2011

Publication of notice of alteration to the electoral register	Tuesday 26 April 2011
Deadline for notification of appointment of polling and counting agents	Tuesday 26 April 2011
First date that electors can apply for replacements for lost postal votes	Wednesday 27 April 2011
Polling day	7am to 10pm on Thursday 5 May 2011
Last re-issue of spoilt and lost postal votes	5pm on Thursday 5 May 2011
Last applications for proxy due to medical emergency	5pm on Thursday 5 May 2011
Last time to alter the register due to clerical error and court appeal	9pm on Thursday 5 May 2011