



BRIEFING PAPER

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Individual Electoral Registration

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Summary

The Government decided to bring forward the end date for the transition to the new system of Individual Electoral Registration to December 2015 instead of December 2016 as provided for in the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013*. The Government argued that to do so would mean a more accurate register. However, there have been concerns that a more accurate register is not necessarily a more complete register.

The December 2015 electoral register has been used for calculating the electoral quota by the Boundary Commissions for the next review of constituency boundaries which has been launched on 24 February 2016.

The Electoral Commission published an [Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#), on 24 February 2016.

The Commission reported that:

- The number of entries on the **local government registers** in December 2015 was **44,934,029** (a decrease of approximately 1% since December 2014/March 2015 and 3% since February/March 2014, when the last revised registers compiled under the old system were published).
- The number of entries on the **parliamentary registers** in December 2015 was **43,478,635**. Similarly to the local government registers, there are fewer entries on the parliamentary registers than in December 2014/March 2015 (-1%) and February/March 2014 (-3%).
- Since the introduction of IER, the electorate in **Wales** has decreased more than in the rest of Great Britain: 5% against 3% in England and 2% in Scotland.
- There are significant variations across local authorities: when compared to December 2014/March 2015, changes range from -12% to +5%, while against the February/March 2014 figures the range is -14% to +11%.
- The number of **attainers** on the local government registers was approximately 278,586, while the parliamentary registers contained 276,185. This is a reduction of 11% and 10% respectively since December 2014/March 2015 and 41% and 40% respectively since February/March 2014.

The Commission will publish an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers in July 2016.

In June 2015 the Electoral Commission had published a report on the progress of the transition to IER which revealed that 1.9 million entries on the register were for electors who were not registered under IER; 4% of all register entries. This percentage varied considerably between local

authority areas, ranging from 0% to 23%. The Commission stated in its February 2016 report that approximately 770,000 entries were removed on publication of the 1 December 2015 registers because of the end of IER transitional arrangements.

This Briefing Paper provides information about the funding for the transition to IER and funding to support a range of initiatives to increase the level of voter registration among under-registered groups, including students. On 9 January 2015 the Government had announced that there would be additional funding of up to £9.8 million in 2015 “to support the costs of activities aimed at increasing the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register”; a further £3 million of additional funding was also made available for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain to target non IER registered carry forward electors.

Background to the introduction of the new system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) which began in 2014 is also provided. Briefly, the last Labour Government made provision for the introduction of IER in the *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* and the implementation was to be phased. The Coalition Government announced in 2010 that it was going to speed up the introduction of the new system and the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* made provision for the introduction of IER by 2015. The introduction of a new system of electoral registration followed repeated calls by the Electoral Commission for a change in the law and concerns about electoral fraud and the integrity of the register.

Registration in Northern Ireland has been on an individual basis since 2002.

1. Background

The Electoral Commission first called for a change to individual electoral registration (IER) in 2003.¹ The Commission initially saw the change as being an essential 'building block' for e-enabled elections but individual registration was later seen as an important measure to guard against electoral fraud. The Commission published a report in June 2003, *Voting for change: an electoral law modernisation programme*, which brought together recommendations from a series of policy papers, including those on registration issues. The Labour Government responded to the report in 2004 and said it was sympathetic to the principles of individual registration but it did not implement the Commission's recommendations, mainly because of concerns about the effect on levels of registration if a system of individual registration was introduced. When individual registration was introduced in Northern Ireland by the *Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002*, the numbers on the register there fell by 10.5% although the legislation was seen as successful in reducing electoral fraud.²

1.1 The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009

Under the last Labour Government the *Political Parties and Elections Act 2009* made provision for the phased implementation of a system of individual electoral registration. This had not been in the original Bill and was added during committee stage in the House of Lords after pressure from the opposition parties.

The new clauses added to the Bill made provision for implementing a system of individual registration of voters under a statutory timetable. Electors' personal identifiers (date of birth, signature and national insurance number) would be collected on a voluntary basis before 2015 after which it would become compulsory for new voters to provide them. The final move to compulsory individual registration would not take place until 2015. The Labour Government said that a phased approach would allow progress to be monitored at each stage to ensure that registration rates would be maintained; the Electoral Commission would be required to publish annual progress reports and to make a final recommendation in 2014 on whether the change to individual registration should take place.

The Coalition Government subsequently decided to accelerate the introduction of IER.³ The then Minister for Constitutional Reform, Mark Harper, made a statement on individual voter registration on 15 September 2010 and said that the Government would bring forward a draft Bill for pre-legislative scrutiny followed by a Bill to introduce individual registration from 2014. IER would be compulsory from 2014

¹ *The Electoral registration process: report and recommendations*, Electoral Commission, 2003

² For further information see Section XI of [Library Research Paper 05/65](#), *The Electoral Administration Bill 2005-06*

³ [HC Deb 14 July 2010 c797W](#)

but no one who failed to register individually would be removed from the register until after the 2015 general election.⁴

The Government proposed pilot schemes to test whether access to databases such as those of the DVLA, HMRC and DWP would help EROs in compiling an accurate and complete register.

Local authorities were invited to apply for funding for pilots and the prospectus for the data matching pilots gave further information about the schemes:

The purpose of these schemes is to gather evidence on whether access to additional data held by public authorities will be useful in helping Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to maintain and improve electoral registration rates. The schemes may also support EROs by targeting currently underrepresented groups and identifying people who are eligible to be registered but are not currently on the register or for whom the details on the electoral register are inaccurate.

The schemes are intended to support the wider work on ensuring and improving the comprehensiveness and accuracy of the electoral register as part of the overall transition to individual electoral registration, and will also identify whether and how access to public authority databases might assist EROs in meeting their duty under section 9 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006.⁵

In a speech to the Political Studies Association and the Hansard Society in November 2010 the then Deputy Prime Minister, Nick Clegg, said that if the pilot schemes were successful they would be rolled out across the country.⁶

1.2 White Paper and draft legislation in 2011

On 30 June 2011 the Government published a White Paper, [Individual Electoral Registration](#), Cm 8108. The White Paper set out how the introduction of IER would be accelerated. A Written Ministerial Statement gave further details:

Learning from the experience in Northern Ireland we have put in place arrangements to help people manage the transition to the new system. Any electors who do not respond to the initial invitation to register under IER in 2014 will be carried forward unless the registration officer has concerns the registration is ineligible. An individual registration would be required for new registrations and for any elector who wishes to use an absent vote.

The White Paper also considers how else the system of electoral registration could be modernised, making it easier and more convenient to register to vote. Reforming the system also provides the opportunity to take steps to tackle the problem of under-registration. The UK's registration rate compares well internationally but evidence suggests that a significant number of people are missing from the register. This year data-matching

⁴ [HC Deb 15 September 2010 c883](#)

⁵ Cabinet Office Electoral Registration Transformation Programme : Data Matching Schemes

⁶ [Nick Clegg: Councils to get powers to cross-match data](#), BBC, 17 November 2010

pilots will allow registration officers to compare their electoral register with other public databases to identify people missing from the register or entries on the register that are inaccurate or fraudulent. If data matching proves effective, we will consider rolling it out more widely across the country.

We are committed to ensuring there is sufficient funding for implementation, with £108 million allocated over the course of the spending review period. We have also sought to reduce costs where possible and have already cut £74 million of the costs of the previous Government's plans by dropping the voluntary phase.⁷

1.3 Political and Constitutional Reform Committee inquiry

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee examined the Government's proposals for IER in 2011.⁸

The Electoral Commission gave evidence to the Committee on 15 September 2011.⁹ Concerns were raised about the effect on the accuracy and completeness of the register if the Government introduced the 'opt-out' for people who did not wish to be included on the register. The Electoral Commission's full [response](#) to the White Paper was published on 14 October 2011.¹⁰

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee published its report on 4 November 2011.¹¹ The Committee concluded that there was broad agreement on the principle of IER but very differing views on how it should be implemented.

The Committee recommended that the Government should reconsider its decision not to hold a full household canvass in 2014:

We have heard serious concerns that the Government's current proposals will miss an unacceptably large number of potential electors, and calls from many of our witnesses for a full household canvass in 2014 to address this problem. We believe, given the unique circumstances of the change to IER, that the Government should reconsider its decision not to hold a full household canvass in 2014.¹²

The Committee also recommended that it should initially be an offence to fail to complete a voter registration form although this could be reviewed after five years of operation of the new system 'by which time registration levels may be high enough and a culture of individual registration sufficiently embedded for compulsion no longer to be necessary'.¹³

⁷ HC Deb 30 June 2011 c59WS

⁸ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual Electoral Registration and electoral administration*, [HC 1463](#), 2010-12

⁹ [Evidence](#), 15 September 2011

¹⁰ Electoral Commission [press release](#), 14 October 2011

¹¹ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual Electoral Registration and electoral administration*, [HC 1463](#), 2010-12

¹² Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, *Individual Electoral Registration and electoral administration*, HC 1463, 2010-12, [Conclusions and recommendations](#)

¹³ *ibid*

The Committee expressed concern that the electoral registers in December 2015 which will be used for the next boundary review 'will be particularly varied in their levels of completeness' and recommended that the registers to be used as the basis for this review should be the registers as they were on or before polling day in May 2015.

The evidence the Committee had received suggested that data matching would be of limited effectiveness, especially in identifying potential electors. The Committee therefore recommended that the Electoral Commission should publish its evaluations of the data-matching pilots before the second reading of the Bill and that the Government should 'explore ways of improving the sharing of information between local authorities, especially where potential electors move house' to identify duplicate entries on the registers.

The Committee made a number of other recommendations which included a proposal to drop the requirement of a signature as a personal identifier to cast a postal vote once the new system of IER was well established; a call for the edited register to be abolished and a recommendation that the Government should 'ensure that the funding it provides to support local authorities with the transition to IER is ring-fenced for this purpose'. The Committee also suggested that there was a strong case for the Electoral Commission to be given powers "to intervene where EROs consistently fail to meet agreed performance standards".¹⁴

The Electoral Commission published a [briefing](#) for the Opposition Day [debate](#) on IER on 16 January 2012 which included comments on the Committee's recommendations.

The Government published its response to the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee's report on 9 February 2012.¹⁵ The changes to the Government's policy on the introduction of IER were announced in a Written Statement:¹⁶

- The information held by the DWP would be used to match the details of individuals held on the electoral register when IER was introduced.
- The Government had not yet made a decision on whether to allow an individual to 'opt-out' from registering to vote nor as to whether there should be a new criminal offence for an individual not to register.
- The Government had decided to delay the annual canvass in 2013 to early 2014; this would ensure that a more accurate and up-to-date register was used as the basis for the new IER register.

¹⁴ [ibid](#)

¹⁵ Government response to pre-legislative scrutiny and public consultation on Individual Electoral Registration and amendments to Electoral Administration law, [Cm 8245](#), February 2012

¹⁶ [HC Deb 9 February 2012 c38WS](#)

2. Introduction of IER

2.1 The *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013*

The *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill 2012-13* was introduced on 10 May 2012. [Library Research Paper 12/26](#) gives further details. [Library Standard Note 6359](#) provides information about the progress of the Bill which received Royal Assent on 31 January 2013. The Act provided a legislative framework for the introduction of IER; the detailed arrangements would be in regulations made under the powers given to the Secretary of State.

2.2 Decision to introduce IER in 2014

The Government announced in a Written Ministerial Statement on 18 December 2013 that the change to IER would take place in 2014.¹⁷ This would be on 10 June 2014 in England and Wales, and on 19 September 2014 in Scotland:

The Government will fully fund the costs of transition to individual electoral registration. All electoral registration officers have been notified of the funding they will receive next year to deliver the change at a local level.

[...]

This extra funding is in addition to the local resources that are annually devoted by electoral registration officers to meeting their statutory obligation to produce a complete and accurate register. The Government expect local authorities to continue this level of funding. The Government will fund and promote work to maximise registration during the transition to individual electoral registration, at a local and national level.

As a transitional arrangement, eligible electors who appear on the electoral register before the introduction of individual electoral registration will continue to be entitled to vote in elections, including the 2015 general election, whether or not they have registered individually. It remains the Government's intention to conclude this transitional arrangement in 2015, but the Electoral Registration and Administration Act will allow the next Parliament to make the decision, following the advice and assessment of the Electoral Commission, as to whether the transition should conclude in 2015 or 2016.¹⁸

2.3 Timetable for the implementation of IER July – August 2013

The Confirmation Dry Run (CDR) was held in the summer of 2013. This was the matching of all 380 electoral registers (around 46 million electors) against records held by the Department for Work and Pensions.

¹⁷ [HC Deb 18 December 2014 c105WS](#)

¹⁸ *ibid*

October 2013

The Cabinet Office published an evaluation of the CDR in October 2013.¹⁹ A summary of the report was also published and this noted that:

Overall, the results of the CDR are better than expected with an average match rate of 78% and a median rate of 81%. Local data matching has shown the potential to add on average a further 7% to the overall match rate. Feedback on the process of CDR was largely positive, but some lessons and possible improvements have been identified for the Cabinet Office to work on ahead of confirmation in 2014.²⁰

The Electoral Commission published a report on 23 October 2013 on the results of the Government's test of the confirmation.²¹ This report found that:

- Across Great Britain there was a 78% record match between the electoral registers and the DWP system, a six percentage point improvement on a pilot that the Commission evaluated earlier this year.
- However, match rates varied from 46.9% in Kensington and Chelsea to 86.4% in Mansfield.
- Students, young adults and private renters were least likely to be automatically transferred.
- The vast majority (85%) of electoral registration officers (EROs) were confident about the process of confirming electors.²²

The results of the data matching by local authority (and by ward) of the Confirmation Dry Run have been made available in the appendix at the end of the Commission's [report](#) and gave an idea of the number of electors who would possibly be at risk of eventually being removed from the register if they did not register under IER. However, all electors on the current register would be carried forward to the register to be used for the 2015 general election.

On 23 October 2013 the Electoral Commission also published its assessment of whether sufficient progress had been made with the implementation process for IER for the necessary commencement order to be signed which would bring the transitional provisions for IER into force from June 2014.²³

The Commission identified a number of risks which it considered the Government needed to address including:

¹⁹ [Simplifying the transition to Individual Electoral Registration: an evaluation of the 'confirmation dry run' – using data matching to confirm electors on the electoral register](#), Cabinet Office, October 2013

²⁰ [Simplifying the transition to Individual Electoral Registration: an evaluation of the 'confirmation dry run' – using data matching to confirm electors on the electoral register summary](#), Cabinet Office, October 2013

²¹ [Confirmation dry run results](#), Electoral Commission, October 2013

²² [Major change to electoral registration can go ahead but risks to address says Electoral Commission](#), news release, 23 October 2013

²³ [The Electoral Commission's assessment of IER implementation readiness](#), 23 October 2013

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- The IT system that will be used to verify people, and a new online registration system, have yet to be fully tested. The Government intends to test them in March 2014, just three months before the start date for IER. This is a tight timetable and the Government must be clearer about its testing and contingency plans and how it will mitigate the risks that have been identified.
- Electoral registration officers and their staff need to be told as soon as possible how much funding they will receive to deliver the transition to IER. The government must continue to engage with them in order to have a good understanding of their preparedness.²⁴

However, the Commission concluded that the change to the registration system could proceed.

On 6 November 2013 the Association of Electoral Administrators published its [Formal views on readiness for the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration \(IER\) in June 2014](#). The Association reported that the general view of its members was that they would deliver IER 'despite the considerable challenges it will present'. Particular concerns related to the reliance on third parties for the IT infrastructure and data-processing; to the significant impact on administrators' workload of the introduction of IER during the period of the local and European Parliamentary elections in 2014 and a lack of confidence in the new IER forms. The AEA also remained concerned about the practical difficulties of registering students, as well as residents of Houses in Multiple Occupation (HMOs). In the long term the Association raised the issue of adequate funding for the new system after the transitional period was over:

...the business as usual (BAU) costs for EROs of registering electors individually are not yet clear. We have received no guarantees about the BAU funding arrangements at a time when a further reduction in local government funding is planned for 2015-16. Whilst we hope that online registration will offset much of the additional expenditure we envisage as a result of the additional administrative requirements of IER, we cannot be sure of the uptake at this stage and must assume that additional budget provision will be required.²⁵

October 2013

The household annual canvass began in England, Wales and Scotland. This ran until February 2014 in England and to March 2014 in Scotland and Wales.

November 2013

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee took evidence on 7 November 2013 from the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office

²⁴ [Major change to electoral registration can go ahead but risks to address says Electoral Commission](#), news release, 23 October 2013

²⁵ [Formal views on readiness for the implementation of Individual Electoral Registration \(IER\) in June 2014](#), Association of Electoral Administrators, 6 November 2013

about the Commission's assessment of readiness for the implementation of IER in 2014.²⁶

The Committee questioned the Electoral Commission on its independent assessment of the plans for transition to individual electoral registration in 2014. Jenny Watson, Chair of the Electoral Commission, reiterated the Commission's view that, while there were some concerns about specific aspects of the transition that the Cabinet Office had to address, there was no reason not to proceed. The Commission's main concerns were related to delivery of the IT systems that administrators will need to use to operate IER and the level of engagement by the Cabinet Office with electoral administrators. There were also concerns about the time scales between delivery of IT systems and the expected 'go live' date. However, the Commission said that it was confident that the extra funding put in place by the Cabinet Office to assist EROs with the transition to IER was adequate and that funding was not a reason for the transition to IER not to be achieved.

Cabinet Office officials also gave evidence at the same session of the Committee. In their responses the officials said that the Cabinet Office was confident that it had plans in place to address the concerns raised by the Electoral Commission.

December 2013

The Government announced in a Written Ministerial Statement that the change to IER would take place in 2014.²⁷

January 2014

Training of electoral administrators.

22 May 2014

Local and European Parliamentary elections.

June – July 2014

The new system of IER went live in England and Wales on 10 June; those electors who were matched against the DWP database were confirmed on the new IER register and household enquiry forms (HEFs) and invitations to register were sent to addresses and individuals respectively where the EROs were not certain whether all the residents who were eligible to be registered had been transferred to the new IER system. There was a national public awareness campaign about the introduction of the new registration system by the Electoral Commission.

18 September 2014

Referendum on independence for Scotland.

²⁶ Political and Constitutional Reform Committee: [oral evidence session](#) on IER, 7 November 2013

²⁷ [HC Deb 18 December 2014 c105WS](#)

September – October 2014

IER was introduced in Scotland on 19 September, after the referendum.

1 December 2014

Publication of the register (2 March 2015 in Scotland).

7 May 2015

General election.

June 2015

The Electoral Commission published a report about the progress of the transition to the new system of IER and did not recommend an early end to the transition period.

16 July 2015

The Government laid the *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2015* before Parliament. The Order ends the transition to IER in December 2015 instead of December 2016.

6 August 2015

The [*Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 \(Transitional Provisions\) Order 2015*](#) came into force.

3. Funding for the transition to IER

The Explanatory Notes to the *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill* gave details of the financial effects of its provisions:

139. A total of £108m was allocated at the Spending Review in 2010 to meet the cost of implementing Individual Electoral Registration. This includes £85m resource funding in 2014/15 to fund registration officers to make contact with each potential elector individually and invite them to register in 2014 with the potential to use data matching to confirm existing entries during the transition.

140. It is estimated that after the move to Individual Electoral Registration is complete, the annual ongoing cost of electoral registration will be an additional £13m per annum; although any future decision to stop the annual canvass as provided for in the Bill can be expected to bring costs down significantly (it is too early to say whether there would be any net savings as the running costs of a replacement for the annual canvass – which could be based on data matching – are as yet unknown). These costs will need to be factored into the next spending review.²⁸

A Cabinet Office press release on 31 October 2013 gave details of the funding for the roll-out of IER:

A national formula has been used to calculate what each area needs to cover the cost of the data matching process that will ensure the vast majority of the population will transfer automatically onto the new electoral register without taking any action, as well as other costs such as writing to people to tell them they will need to register.²⁹

A [spreadsheet](#) on the Cabinet Office website broke down the funding available for the transition to IER by region.

²⁸ [Explanatory Notes](#) to the *Electoral Registration and Administration Bill 2012-13*

²⁹ [Funding for the roll-out of Individual Electoral Registration](#), Cabinet Office press release, 31 October 2013

4. Funding to maximise the rate of voter registration

A Written Statement on 5 July 2013 gave details of the additional funding that the Government would make available to local authorities and other organisations to maximise the rate of voter registration ahead of the transition to IER in 2014, this would be up to £4.2 million. The funding was to support a range of initiatives to increase the level of voter registration among under-registered groups; these included:

The Targeted Canvassing Fund - A fund which will enable electoral registration officers (EROs) to carry out intensified canvassing activity in areas with a high proportion of under-registration.

The ERO Registration Fund - A fund which will support proposals for activities from electoral registration officers who will use their knowledge of the needs of their local populations to customise their measures.

Innovation Fund - We will be looking to fund innovative bottom-up approaches to increase representation of under-registered groups (URGs) on the electoral register. We are particularly interested in new innovative approaches to engage communities and increase voter registration.

Schools Outreach - We will be looking for organisations to deliver a set lesson framework, Rock Enrol, which has been developed and piloted with Bite the Ballot, to a number of schools across England and Wales. This is also available to organisations in Scotland, although we will be looking to ensure that proposals take account of planned activity in schools ahead of the independence referendum.³⁰

On 9 January 2015 the Government announced that there would be additional funding of up to £9.8 million in 2015 “to support the costs of activities aimed at increasing the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register”:

This funding will help build on the work delivered through the £4.2 million maximising registration funding which the Government made available in 2013/14.

[...]

The funding will be allocated at both a national and local level. At a local level, every electoral registration officer (ERO) in Great Britain will receive a share of £6.8 million with allocations based on levels of under registration. Activity delivered by EROs as a result could include further letters to households—to help identify those who have moved home and invite those that need to register to do so—and more door-to-door canvassing, targeted either at under-registered groups such as students, or specific wards where registration rates are lower. Up to £2.5 million funding will be available to fund wider activity, including working with national organisations. This funding will support activity to encourage specific under registered groups such as students, overseas electors and armed service personnel to register to vote. Finally, up to £500 thousand will be used to support efforts to

³⁰ [HC Deb 5 July 2013 c72WS](#)

boost confidence in the integrity of the electoral process in areas where a number of allegations of impropriety have been made in the past.³¹

On 24 February 2015 the Government announced further funding of £20 million in addition to the “more than £14 million provided to support the costs of activities at a local and national level to maximise the number of people on the register”:

The government has announced today that it is providing an additional £20 million to local authorities in 2015 to 2016. This latest round of funding is part of the programme’s multi-year plan for funding the transition and will ensure that local councils have the necessary funds to continue IER’s successful delivery without having to dip into their existing council budgets.

This builds on the £30 million provided since 2013 to 2014 and will be used by councils for activities such as canvassing and issuing letters and forms to electors. Crucially, these grants are not ring-fenced to ensure that local authorities have the flexibility they need to invest their funding creatively and efficiently at a regional level.³²

4.1 Funding to target non-IER registered carry forward voters

On 16 July 2015 the Government announced that there would be additional funding to help Electoral Registration Officers target those people on the register who had been carried forward from the old household register but who were not yet registered under IER:

...up to £3 million of additional funding is being made available for all electoral registration officers in Great Britain to target their non IER registered carry forward electors.

This funding will be targeted primarily at those authorities which have more than 5% of their register consisting of carry forward electors. All authorities however will be entitled to bid for funding, if they feel they need to take additional steps to target this group of electors.³³

A Cabinet Office [press release](#) noted that the £3 million extra funding would mean that “local authorities will be able to clear inaccurate entries from the register by the end of the year”.

³¹ [HC Deb 9 January 2015 c18WS](#)

³² [Local authorities receive additional £20 million for voter registration](#), Cabinet Office press release, 24 February 2015

³³ [HC Deb 16 July 2015 c27WS](#)

5. Registration levels following the introduction of IER

A PQ answered on 1 December 2014 gave a figure for the final match rate across Great Britain, after data matching with DWP and local data, of 87%, 40.5 million voters.

The confirmation dry run match rate with Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) data for Great Britain is included in the Electoral Commission's report on the dry run, which is available on its website. Across Great Britain 78% of electors could be matched with DWP. Subsequent analysis, from the trial of local data matching by 139 electoral registration officers, suggested that local data matching added an average of 6% to the overall match rate.

The results of the confirmation live run for Great Britain were included in the Commission's recently published report on the live run in Scotland, which is also available on its website. The data for Great Britain was only available at this point as the transition to IER in Scotland began after the referendum on independence. The final match rate, after matching with DWP and local data, across Great Britain was 87%. These figures mean that overall approximately 40.5 million electors were matched.

Electoral Registration Officers are now working to target those existing electors who could not be matched, as well as those not currently on the registers at all.

The Commission will next report on the transition to Individual Electoral Registration in England and Wales in February 2015 following the publication of the registers by 1 December 2014. This report will be based on the results of our ongoing monitoring of performance as well as detailed, local authority-level data collected from EROs. A separate assessment for Scotland will be published in April 2015 following the publication of the revised registers there by 2 March 2015.³⁴

In February 2015 the Electoral Commission published a [report](#) on the progress of the implementation of IER in February 2015. The Commission had found that the December 2014 registers

..contained approximately 920,000 fewer entries than the registers published in February/March 2014 following the 2013 canvass, which indicates a decrease of approximately 2%.³⁵

The Commission gave further details of the reasons for this and their proposals for the 2015 canvass:

The decrease in the electorate is likely to be the result of the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – were only required to be sent to properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO

³⁴ [PQ 215316](#), 1 December 2014

³⁵ [Analysis of the December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales: the implementation of IER progress report](#), Electoral Commission, February 2015, p6

believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered.

This means that home-movers have not been captured as effectively as they would have been during a typical annual canvass where all households would receive a form. The processes followed in 2014 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending household enquiry forms to all properties to check who is resident at an address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register, and carrying out follow up activity as required.

To fill this gap, we raised in the autumn of last year the possibility of EROs sending household notification letters (HNL) to every household in their area. We have welcomed the recent announcement that the UK Government has provided funding which will allow EROs to send these letters in early 2015. These household notification letters will show who is registered to vote at that particular address and will prompt anyone who is not yet registered – including attainers – to do so. Further information on this activity can be found in Chapter 4 of our report.³⁶

The Commission looked at the data available for the status of electors not confirmed on 1 December 2014 (these figures were based on data provided by 158 local authorities and the Commission warned that they were to be treated as indicative estimates):

3.74 The data suggests that approximately:

- one in three electors who were not confirmed have since been registered individually (either as a result of successfully completing a registration application or having gone through the exceptions or attestation route)
- one in four have been removed because the ERO had two proofs of evidence that the elector was no longer living at that address (or because the entry had been carried forward at the conclusion of the 2013 canvass and so was required by law to be removed).
- One in two are being retained because he/she has either not responded to the invitation to register or because the ERO has not enough evidence that the elector has moved.

3.75 As set out in para 3.29-3.36, electors in this last category (retained) are estimated to make up approximately 5% of entries (approximately 2-2.5 million) on the December 2014 registers. As with the other findings in this chapter, this level varies across the country from roughly 1% to 20% although it is important to note that this range is based on the authorities for which we have received data.³⁷

The Electoral Commission published a further [report](#) in June 2015 about the progress of the transition to IER.³⁸ The data the Commission had received from all 380 Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain showed that the state of the electoral registers in May 2015 was as follows:

³⁶ *ibid*

³⁷ *ibid*

³⁸ [Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration: May 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#), Electoral Commission, June 2015,

- The **local government registers in May 2015 contained 46,814,081 entries**. This is an increase of 1% since February/March 2014, when the last registers were published under the household system of registration.
- **The parliamentary registers in May 2015 contained 45,336,013 entries**. This is an increase of 1% since February/March 2014.
- **Approximately 1.9 million register entries on the local government registers are for electors who are not registered individually and so are being retained under the IER transitional arrangements**. This represents 4% of all register entries.³⁹

The Commission did not recommend that the transition to IER should come to an end in December 2015 and noted that:

Data collected from EROs across Great Britain indicates that, in May 2015, approximately **1.9 million register entries on the local government registers are for electors who are not registered individually and so are being retained under the IER transitional arrangements**. This represents 4% of all register entries. However, it is important to note that within this overall figure, retained entries as a percentage of total register entries vary by local authority area and range from 0% to 23%, and all of these areas will have at least one election in May 2016.

If the transition were to end today, the registers would therefore decrease in size by 1.9 million entries, with some registers decreasing significantly more than others. While there is still work to be done between now and December 2015 which we expect will reduce this number, it does provide an indication of the maximum potential impact of ending the transition this year.⁴⁰

Chapter 4 of the Commission's [report](#) analysed local variations in the number of retained entries:

4.21 Across Great Britain as a whole, the total number of retained entries corresponds to 4% of the total size of the registers, but this varies significantly across local authorities. Some authorities reported retained entries as being less than 1% of the total number of register entries, with Epping Forest showing the lowest level (0.4%).

4.22 However, there are also a number of local authority areas with retained entries making up 10% or over of all register entries. These authorities are in urban areas with a high student concentration (Glasgow, Cambridge) or London boroughs (Brent, Hackney, Haringey, Lambeth, Kensington and Chelsea, Redbridge). Hackney has the highest level, with 23% of their total register being retained.

4.23 The number of London boroughs with high proportions of retained entries further underlines the importance of considering the transition end date in relation to the polls scheduled for May 2016 – which includes elections to the Greater London Assembly and for London Mayor.

³⁹ *ibid*, p4

⁴⁰ *ibid*, p7

The data on the electoral registers as at May 2015 is available on the Electoral Commission's website on the page showing its [electoral registration research](#).

The Electoral Commission published a report on 24 February 2016 on the state of the December 2015 registers. In an [Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#), the Commission reported that:

- The number of entries on the **local government registers** in December 2015 was **44,934,029** (a decrease of approximately 1% since December 2014/March 2015 and 3% since February/March 2014, when the last revised registers compiled under the old system were published).
- The number of entries on the **parliamentary registers** in December 2015 was **43,478,635**. Similarly to the local government registers, there are fewer entries on the parliamentary registers than in December 2014/March 2015 (-1%) and February/March 2014 (-3%).
- Since the introduction of IER, the electorate in **Wales** has decreased more than in the rest of Great Britain: 5% against 3% in England and 2% in Scotland.
- There are significant variations across local authorities: when compared to December 2014/March 2015, changes range from -12% to +5%, while against the February/March 2014 figures the range is -14% to +11%.
- The number of **attainers** on the local government registers was approximately 278,586, while the parliamentary registers contained 276,185. This is a reduction of 11% and 10% respectively since December 2014/March 2015 and 41% and 40% respectively since February/March 2014.
- Local authorities with high concentration of **students** appear to have been more affected by IER as their registers decreased more significantly than the average. However, these authorities also recorded very high level of additions in the months preceding the May 2015 elections.

The Commission stated that approximately 770,000 entries were removed on publication of the 1 December 2015 registers because of the end of IER transitional arrangements.

The Commission will publish an assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers in July 2016.

6. Registration of students

In December 2014 the BBC published research which suggested that thousands of students had failed to register to vote under the new IER system:

The BBC looked at figures from nine areas where the student population is low - North Norfolk, Tamworth, Tewkesbury, Derbyshire Dales, Barrow-in-Furness, Weymouth and Portland, Boston and Richmondshire.

In those areas, the total number of registered voters, which was 457,099 in 2012 dropped by 4,139 in 2013 and dropped by nearly three times as much, 11,394, between 2013 and 2014.

But in 21 areas with large student populations, the change is more dramatic.

The BBC looked at voter registration figures from Manchester, Birmingham, Newcastle upon Tyne, Cardiff, Leicester, Oxford, Southampton, Coventry, Cambridge, Portsmouth, Plymouth, Canterbury, Swansea, Bath and North East Somerset, Bradford, Bournemouth, Exeter, Kirklees, Lancaster, Norwich and Derby.

In total, registered voters, who numbered nearly 4.49m in 2012, dropped by 9,727 in 2013 and by a massive 181,552 in 2014 - nineteen times higher than the drop-off the previous year.⁴¹

During a speech in Sheffield on 16 January 2015, Ed Miliband said that one million voters were missing from the electoral register and that hundreds of thousands of them were students:

Labour said 307 of 373 local authorities that provided data had recorded a reduction in their electoral roll. Overall, there had been a reduction of 950,845, the party said.

Labour has claimed the number of people registered to vote has fallen sharply in many university towns, blaming in part changes which mean universities and colleges can no longer block-register students living in halls of residence to vote.⁴²

The Electoral Commission commented on the figures released by the Labour Party:

It's important as many people as possible are registered to vote before the elections in May. It has always been known that some areas with large student populations would initially see a fall in the number of students on their register and that extra effort would be needed to ensure as many as possible are on the register before the 20 April deadline.

The figures published on 1 December were a snapshot of the registers at that stage and Electoral Registration Officers all have detailed plans in place to target areas with high student populations. This work will continue right up until the registration deadline.

The Commission is supporting this activity by launching major online and TV advertising campaigns in February and March to encourage people to register to vote. We are also working with a

⁴¹ [Thousands of student voters yet to register](#), *BBC News online*, 7 December 2014

⁴² [Labour attacks missing voters 'scandal'](#), *BBC News online*, 16 January 2015

range of partners that engage directly with young people to help ensure as many as possible are registered.⁴³

The Commission welcomed the additional Government funding to help EROs maximise registration rates (see above) and acknowledged that there was a need to encourage students to register. Previously, under the old household system of registration, universities had been able to register students living in halls of residence en bloc but now this was no longer possible. In January 2015 the Commission wrote to Vice Chancellors of universities and Principals of colleges to encourage them to run voter registration drives on campuses.⁴⁴

There was a [debate](#) on electoral registration on 4 February 2015 and Sadiq Khan (Labour) called on the Government and the Electoral Commission “to do more to tackle under-registration, including block-registering students in university or college accommodation and people living in adult sheltered accommodation and care homes.”⁴⁵ The then Minister for the Constitution, Sam Gyimah, responded:

In my view, you either believe in individual voter registration or you do not. You cannot have it both ways. Singling out any group of voters for block registration would be a step backwards to the old, discredited system of registration.

[...]

In 2013, my right hon. Friend the Minister for Universities, Science and Cities wrote to all vice-chancellors and academic registrars, encouraging them to look at multiple ways of getting students on to the register. We have set up a student forum in which best practice can be shared. If any academic registrars are not doing that, Members should by all means let me know, and we will write to them again to ensure that they are engaging in best practice.

Let me now answer the question about block registration. Data-sharing between universities and local authorities is the key, and we are working to ensure that all universities share data. That will enable electoral registration offers to have students’ enrolment details, and to chase them to register. It also means that we can preserve the central tenet of IER, which is that individuals should be responsible for their own registration.⁴⁶

On 5 February 2015 Cabinet Office ministers sent a [letter](#) to University Vice-Chancellors in England, Scotland and Wales to ask them for their support in ensuring that more students were registered to vote under the IER system:

We are writing to ask for your continued support to ensure your students are made aware of their individual responsibility to register to vote. Many of you are working with your local Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and your cooperation is helping them reach students to give them the right information to help them to register to vote.

⁴³ [Electoral Commission statement on the move to Individual Electoral Registration](#), Electoral Commission news release, 16 January 2015

⁴⁴ [Universities and colleges asked to support student voter registration drive](#), Electoral Commission news release, 14 January 2015

⁴⁵ [HC Deb 4 February 2015 c344](#)

⁴⁶ [HC Deb 4 February 2015 c356-7](#)

23 Individual Electoral Registration

As you are aware, the way all of us, including students, register to vote changed last year. We are in the middle of a transition to the new system and we have already successfully moved nearly 9 out of 10 electors to the new system automatically. We now have a world-class, modern and convenient way of registering online, a process that takes minutes and should be particularly convenient for your students as frequent home movers. The majority of people opt to register online and user satisfaction rates are over 90% so we are convinced this is the most accessible and easiest way for your students to register.

The Cabinet Office has for two years been working with and has received a commitment from Universities UK, Guild HE, the Academic Registrars Council, the Association of Colleges and the National Union of Students to assist EROs by providing the names and addresses of all students and by promoting online registration at key times such as enrolment. We know many registrars and student services have taken this support further by emailing students to remind them to register and welcoming EROs to your universities to meet students. Where universities are engaged with their EROs we are seeing more students registering.

These universities have enabled their students to make a choice to have a vote in the community where they study which will mean their students' opinions and issues relevant to their university life will be heard. This commitment from universities has been the driving force behind some innovative digital projects including integrating enrolment and registration at the University of Sheffield and Manchester Metropolitan University. This demonstrates the progress that can be made when universities, Students' Unions and EROs work together and we believe this cooperative working engages students in the democratic process in a far more effective way than did the old system of 'block registration' when students were added to and deleted from the register without their knowledge.

Like you, we wish to see the highest possible rates of student registration across all institutions. With National Voter Registration Day upon us, we would like to encourage every institution to work with local EROs to ensure every eligible student can make their voice heard on 7 May.

The Electoral Commission, together with other bodies including the National Union of Students, also sent a similar [letter](#) to University Vice-Chancellors and College Principals.

A [press release](#) issued by the Cabinet Office on 24 February 2015 gave details of £530,000 provided by the Coalition Government to encourage students to register to vote; the NUS received £380,000, with the remaining £150,000 being divided between organisations in the further education sector. The press release also noted:

New government guidance for local Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) allows them to use of data held by universities to confirm the identities of students applying to register. This means that even if students cannot include their National Insurance number, or if data held on different public databases doesn't match, they can still be confirmed on the register using the information they used to enrol at university.

The Cabinet Office established a Student Forum in 2013, comprising representatives of local authorities and the higher

education sector. The forum has agreed a number of practical steps to increase student registration including improved provision of data from Universities to EROs to help them target students individually.

Ministers and the Electoral Commission have both written to vice chancellors encouraging them to work with EROs to maximise student registration and the Electoral Commission's awareness campaign for the general election will include a specific focus on reaching students.⁴⁷

In its report on the administration of the 2015 general election the Electoral Commission commented on the work that EROs had done with the universities in their area:

3.8 EROs undertook significant work to boost registration locally. For example, a large number of EROs worked in partnership with Operation Black Vote to arrange for its registration bus to visit their area to help to encourage Black and Minority Ethnic residents in registering to vote. Additionally, in key university towns, EROs built on partnerships with local universities, the National Union of Students (NUS) and other youth organisations to host registration events to maximise registration among students and young people.⁴⁸

The Association of Electoral Administrators also published a [report](#) on the 2015 general elections. The Association recommended that the Government should review the procedures for the registration of students:

5.9 The registration of students and care homes under IER is extremely difficult under current legislative procedures and has resulted in far fewer students and care home residents being registered. A review of how these two groups can be registered more easily should be undertaken, with consideration being given to allowing EROs to directly register people at institutions.

Recommendation:

The UK Government should review the registration of students and care homes under IER, with a view to making legislative changes to allow EROs to directly register people at "institutions".⁴⁹

⁴⁷ [Government funds NUS competition to get students to #RegisterToVote](#), Cabinet Office press release, 24 February 2015

⁴⁸ [Report on the administration of the 7 May 2015 elections including the UK Parliamentary general election](#), Electoral Commission, July 2015

⁴⁹ [Elections and IER: the challenge of 2015](#), Association of Electoral Administrators, July 2015

7. Association of Electoral Administrators' report

In July 2015 the Association of Electoral Administrators published a report on the introduction of IER and the May 2015 elections, [*Elections and the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration: the challenge of 2015*](#).

The executive summary to the report states:

This report provides an account of the experience of electoral administrators in delivering IER and the polls on 7 May 2015 and offers recommendations for improvements to the framework for electoral administration in the UK.

Chapter five of the report examined the transition to IER. There are comments about the surge in online registration applications following National Registration Day and an Electoral Commission television campaign; some electoral administrators commented on the number of duplicate registrations:

A National Registration Day was held on 5 February 2015. The registration day was publicised by the Electoral Commission, Cabinet Office and local authorities and, as a result, 166,000 applications to register were received on that one day. However, the ability to register online easily meant that a lot of these applications were duplicate registrations, made by electors who were already registered and were therefore not new registrations.

The AEA points out that there was “no “look up” facility available online which a potential applicant registering to vote could use to see if they are already registered before completing an application to register. If this was part of the process, it would be likely to have a significant impact in terms of reducing the number of duplicate applications”.

In its conclusion to the report the AEA states that:

Whilst IER has been delivered successfully along with the introduction of online registration, this report has highlighted some of the issues during the run up to the elections, including the volume of duplicate registrations and implications for absent voting. IER appears to have been a success and, for that reason, the end of IER transition should be December 2015 to provide certainty for the important elections in 2016 and the European Referendum whenever that is held. However, despite the introduction of IER with online registration, electoral registration is still operating with old processes, a HEF canvass and additional bureaucracy. As a result, a full review of IER is required to allow IER to become more efficient, less bureaucratic and easier to understand from the individual's perspective.⁵⁰

⁵⁰ [*Elections and IER: the challenge of 2015*](#), Association of Electoral Administrators, July 2015

8. Order to end the transition to IER in December 2015

The *Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013* made provision for the transitional period for the introduction of IER to come to an end in 2016 although the Secretary of State was given the power to end the transition a year earlier in December 2015. At the end of transition any entries on the electoral register for electors who are not registered individually will be removed from the register.

In its report, published in June 2015, about the progress of the transition to IER, the Electoral Commission did not recommend an early end to the transition period:

Taking into account the data and evidence which is available to us at this point and the significant polls which are scheduled for May 2016, we recommend that Ministers should not make an order to bring forward the end of the transition to IER. We recommend that the end date for IER transition should remain, as currently provided for in law, December 2016.⁵¹

The Executive Summary to the report noted that:

...the legislation allows the UK Government to make an Order - during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015 - which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by the UK Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.⁵²

The Electoral Commission set out the pros and cons of ending the transition period a year earlier:

Risks and benefits

If the transition ends in December 2015, there is a potential benefit to the accuracy of the register – with any retained entries which are redundant or inaccurate being removed – but also a risk to the completeness of the register and to participation, with retained entries relating to eligible electors being removed. Any individuals removed from the register as a result would need to make a successful registration application in order to re-register and so to be able to vote in any polls held after December 2015.

In contrast, if the transition continues to December 2016, the main benefit relates to completeness – with entries for any eligible electors who are not registered individually retained on the registers – with the potential risk being to accuracy, with retained entries which may be redundant or inaccurate being kept on the register for a further year unless the ERO takes steps to review or remove them.

In terms of managing these risks, the earlier timetable puts the greater onus on electors as they will need to take action in order to ensure they are able to remain registered and so can participate in the May 2016 polls. By contrast, the later timetable puts the

⁵¹ [Assessment of progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration: May 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#), Electoral Commission, June 2015, p9

⁵² *ibid*, p3

greater responsibility on EROs to identify and take steps to remove redundant or inaccurate entries.⁵³

The Commission also noted that:

The data we have collected from EROs tells us that if the transition ended now, the registers would decrease in size by 1.9 million entries, with some registers decreasing significantly more than others. While there is still work to be done between now and December 2015 which we expect will reduce this number, it does provide an indication of the maximum potential impact of ending the transition this year.⁵⁴

The Government disagreed with the Electoral Commission and on 16 July 2015 the [Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 \(Transitional Provisions\) Order 2015](#) was laid before Parliament. This Order ends the transition to IER in December 2015. A Written Statement gave further details:

The Electoral Commission has recommended that the transition to IER should end in December 2016. The Government are concerned that by retaining “carry forward” electors (those who have not yet registered under the new system of individual electoral registration) beyond December this year, this will pose an unacceptable risk to the accuracy of the register. Since the registers published by 1 December 2015 will be used for the parliamentary boundary review and then the elections in May 2016, retaining carry forward electors risks having an unknown number of redundant entries on the registers, which would distort the results of the boundary review, increase the risk of electoral fraud, and potentially compromise the integrity of those elections.

The Government do not agree that we should be making a choice between completeness and accuracy, given the importance of both elements in delivering a fair democratic system which commands the confidence and respect of voters. We need to be more ambitious. We can and should aim to achieve both, which is why the Government believe it is crucial that the registers used to conduct the parliamentary boundary review and for next year’s elections are as complete and as accurate as they can possibly be.

The remaining “carry-forward” group of electors is already only a third of its original size and by December they will have been contacted at least nine times to encourage them to register individually. In addition to this, I am pleased to announce that up to £3 million of additional funding is being made available for all electoral registration officers in Great Britain to target their non IER registered carry forward electors.

This funding will be targeted primarily at those authorities which have more than 5% of their register consisting of carry forward electors. All authorities however will be entitled to bid for funding, if they feel they need to take additional steps to target this group of electors.⁵⁵

The Electoral Commission published a press release which expressed its disappointment that the Government had decided to bring forward the end of the transition:

⁵³ [ibid](#), p6-7

⁵⁴ [ibid](#), p53

⁵⁵ [HC 16 July 2015 27WS](#)

The Commission's analysis of the registers used for the May 2015 elections, presented to Parliament on 18 June, found that there were still 1.9 million entries being retained under the transitional arrangements in place for the move to IER from the previous household system. The Government's order will bring forward the end of the transition, meaning that any of the retained entries that are still on the register by 1 December 2015 will be removed at that point.

The Commission expects the activity undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) that is starting this summer to significantly reduce this figure. However, there will now be some electors taken off the register who will not be able to vote in the important elections scheduled for May 2016 unless they register again.⁵⁶

John Turner, Chief Executive of the Association of Electoral Administrators, supported the Government's decision:

"It is crucial to have the most accurate register possible and have confidence that everyone on the register is who they say they are. For those reasons, the Association of Electoral Administrators supports the transition to Individual Electoral Registration ending in 2015."⁵⁷

An Early Day Motion tabled by the Liberal Democrats on 20 July 2015, called for the Order to be annulled:

That an humble Address be presented to Her Majesty, praying that the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2015 (S.I., 2015, No. 1520), dated 15 July 2015, a copy of which was laid before this House on 16 July, be annulled.⁵⁸

In the House of Lords there was a debate on 27 October 2015 on a Liberal Democrat motion to annul the Order.⁵⁹ The motion was moved by Lord Tyler who argued that:

If this order is allowed to slip through, the register in December 2015, which will be used as the basis for the next round of constituency boundary changes, will be missing large numbers of voters. Although these people could re-register between December and April to vote in the elections next year ... these voters will be irrevocably wiped off the face of our democracy for the purposes of the constituency boundary review. They simply will not count when the new constituencies are drawn up. With those potential voters removed—up to one in five in some of the London boroughs—there will be a knock-on effect on the number of constituencies in each place. It is calculated that the number of constituencies in London might be reduced by up to 10.⁶⁰

Lord Kennedy of Southwark (Labour) supported the motion to annul the Order but moved an amendment to it which inserted the words "on the grounds that it goes against the advice of the Electoral Commission".

⁵⁶ [Government announcement on electoral registration system could make it harder for some to vote in May 2016 polls](#), Electoral Commission press release, 16 July 2015

⁵⁷ [Row over plan to speed up individual voter registration](#), BBC News, 16 July 2015

⁵⁸ [EDM 333 2015-16](#)

⁵⁹ [HL Deb 27 October 2015 c1095](#)

⁶⁰ [HL Deb 27 October 2015 c1097](#)

Lord Kennedy set out the reasons the Electoral Commission had given for not ending the transition to IER a year early:

The Electoral Commission is clear that taking the decision before the outcome of the annual canvass means that the decision that the Government are proposing to take is risky because they are acting without reliable information, as we have heard today, on how many redundant entries there will be, how many entries will be removed and how many eligible entries will go back on again for the elections in May 2016—we have massive elections at that time, as we all know. This is not appropriate for the Government, and it is most regrettable. By retaining the cut-off date to the one which we have agreed means we are giving time to the EROs—the professionals—to do more work on improving the accuracy and completeness of the register. I do not think the Government have made a compelling case for bringing forward by one year the date to remove people from the register.⁶¹

The Parliamentary Secretary, Cabinet Office, Lord Bridges of Headley, gave four reasons why the Government had decided to end the transition to IER in December 2015:

First, we believe that after 18 months of transition and more than a decade of waiting, as we enter a year of elections and possibly a referendum on Europe—possibly—the time has come to move fully to the new system. Secondly, we see the risk of fraud as unacceptable. Thirdly, we believe that people have been given ample opportunity to register on the new system. That said, fourthly, we entirely agree with those who want more people to register to vote and participate in the elections, but we do not make the register more complete by stuffing it with inaccurate registrations.⁶²

Lord Bridges also acknowledged the comments made by Peers on the impact on the boundary review of ending the transition to IER:

A number of your Lordships referred to the boundary review, which, as your Lordships will know, begins its work early in the new year, fulfilling the Conservative Party's manifesto commitment to cut the number of MPs and make votes of more equal value. If we are to create constituencies of equal size, the electoral registers used for the boundary review must be accurate across the UK. Otherwise, areas with large numbers of carry-forwards will get more MPs than those with small numbers.⁶³

Lord Tyler's motion was amended but was subsequently disagreed on a division: Contents 246; Not-Contents 257 and the Order was not annulled.

The [*Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 \(Transitional Provisions\) Order 2015*](#) came into force on 6 August 2015.

⁶¹ [HL Deb 27 October 2015 c1100](#)

⁶² [HL Deb 27 October 2015 c1123](#)

⁶³ [HL Deb 27 October 2015 c1127](#)

9. Duty of EROs to ensure a complete and accurate register

Electoral Registration Officers are required by the *Representation of the People Act 1983* to take all steps that are necessary for the purpose of complying with their duty to maintain the registers of Parliamentary electors and local government electors for their area. It is an offence not to comply with a request from an Electoral Registration Officer for the information they require in order to compile the register. The penalty for not providing the relevant information is a fine, currently £1,000. However, there are very few prosecutions for not completing the canvass form.

The *Representation of the People Act 1983* was amended by the *Electoral Administration Act 2006* which added a new Section 9A which sets out the steps that must be taken by EROs to identify people eligible for registration as electors. The steps include: sending the canvass form more than once to any address; making house to house inquiries on more than one occasion and making contact by 'such other means as the registration officer thinks appropriate with persons who do not have an entry in a register'.

The *Electoral Administration Act 2006* also gave the Electoral Commission powers to set and monitor performance standards for electoral administrators. The first performance standards for EROs were published in July 2008 but because of the changes that the transition to IER involved, a new [performance standards framework](#) was developed in 2013. The framework sets out:

- the key challenges facing EROs during the transition to IER;
- what the ERO needs to do to meet the challenges;
- what will demonstrate how the challenges have been met.

10. History of electoral registration

The requirement for householders to supply Electoral Registration Officers with relevant information to enable them to create an electoral register for their area dates back to the nineteenth century. The Electoral Commission noted in its 2003 report, *The electoral registration process*, that:

The current law on electoral registration is still very much based on that introduced in the nineteenth century with more recent changes grafted on. The household canvass, for example, is a throwback to the lengthy period of history when the franchise was based on property ownership.⁶⁴

The *Great Reform Act* of 1832 introduced regulations which established the system of electoral registration. There were a number of Acts reforming the system during the latter half of the nineteenth century but it was not until the *Representation of the People Act 1918* that the compilation of the electoral registers was transferred to the Clerks of the Borough or County Councils. This imposed for the first time a clear obligation on a public official to initiate enquiries in order to prepare an accurate register.⁶⁵

In 1939 the outbreak of war led to the suspension of elections and electoral registration. In January 1942, the report of the Committee on Electoral Machinery suggested that the pre-war system of registration was inadequate to deal with the movements of population during war time and recommended that the register should be based on information obtained from the local Food Offices and that electors would need to have two months residence in the constituency in order to be included on the register (it had previously been six months). The *Representation of the People Act 1948* later removed a qualifying period of residence from the requirements for registration.

There were increasing concerns about registration rates towards the end of the twentieth century. The introduction of the poll tax (community charge) in 1990 had meant that local authorities could use the electoral register as the basis for the community charge register. There was considerable opposition to the poll tax and a means to evade it was to disappear from the electoral register by not responding to the annual canvass. In 1992 Jeremy Smith and Iain McLean published a pamphlet, *The UK poll tax and the declining electoral roll: unintended consequences?* The authors concluded that:

In total the poll tax, it is estimated, can account for slightly more than one-third of the estimated one million people shortfall

⁶⁴ *The electoral registration process: report and recommendations*, Electoral Commission, 2003, p9

⁶⁵ *Electoral reform in England and Wales* by Charles Seymour, David & Charles Reprints, 1915. *Law and the electoral process* by H F Rawlings. Sweet & Maxwell, 1988

between the electoral register and the OPCS estimate of the qualified population.⁶⁶

Following the 1997 general election there were calls for an overhaul of electoral administration generally and for improvements to the level of registration. A Home Office working party (the Howarth Committee) made a number of recommendations, including the introduction of a system of rolling registration. In September 1998, the Home Affairs Select Committee published a report, *Electoral Law and Administration*, which also called for an overhaul of electoral law and the introduction of rolling registration.⁶⁷ In February 2001 the *Representation of the People Regulations (England and Wales) 2001*, made under the *Representation of the People Act 2000* which implemented the recommendations of the Howarth report, introduced rolling registration.

Before the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration the registration system was therefore a combination of annual household registration and individual 'rolling' registration (ie changes of personal details could be registered during the year on the initiative of the individual elector). There is no central electoral register; registers are compiled and maintained locally by Electoral Registration Officers. EROs are required to compile registers of electors for their area for Parliamentary and local elections.

In England, Scotland and Wales an annual canvass form was sent to each household by the local council between September and November. The householder (or a named person) was required to complete and return the form on their own behalf and on behalf of anyone else who lived in the household and who was eligible to vote. The completed form had to contain details of those resident and eligible to vote on a prescribed date, 15 October.

Since February 2001 the introduction of a rolling register provided a voluntary means by which an individual could amend his or her registration details. To do this an individual needed to complete an application form and return it to his new Electoral Registration Officer.

Northern Ireland already has a system of individual registration which was introduced by the *Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002*.

⁶⁶ *The UK poll tax and the declining electoral roll: unintended consequences?* by Jeremy Smith and Iain McLean, Warwick Economic Research papers, University of Warwick, 1992

⁶⁷ HC 768 1997-8

11. Northern Ireland

Northern Ireland has a system of individual electoral registration in place. Electoral fraud was a long-standing problem there and following the 1997 general election, recommendations for change were made by the Northern Ireland Affairs Select Committee and the Northern Ireland Office review *Administering Elections in Northern Ireland*. One of the main problems was the registration of people not resident at the address given. A White Paper was published in March 2001, *Combating Electoral Fraud in Northern Ireland*, which proposed that the elector's date of birth and signature would become required information on the electoral registration form. The [Electoral Fraud \(Northern Ireland\) Act 2002](#) implemented the white paper's recommendations and required people registering to vote to provide their personal details including a National Insurance number.⁶⁸

⁶⁸ For background to the Act see [Library Research Paper 01/63](#), *The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Bill 2001-02*

12. International comparisons

EURIM (the Information Society Alliance) published a study paper [Individual Voter Registration: Lessons from Overseas](#), in March 2011 (updated in May 2011). EURIM's study focused on the issue of the mechanics of electoral registration and how it is done in a number of other countries: Australia, Canada, Denmark, Estonia, Finland, Germany and the Netherlands. The terms of reference excluded electronic voting and the organisation and logistics of polling. EURIM's conclusions are given below:

1. Some of the countries we surveyed put in place sophisticated systems long ago to enable them to capture details leading to a very complete and accurate electoral roll. Compared with these countries, the UK's system is overdue an overhaul, and EURIM welcomes the news that legislation is in preparation.
2. Compulsory registration does not in all cases yield registration rates notably above those achieved in countries without compulsory registration.
3. Proof of identity for registration purposes (although not for voting) is the norm, certainly in our second sample group.
4. Online access may not be a pressing objective today, but the government should recognise that in due course it will be expected as an option for an increasingly IT literate nation provided the security issues can be dealt with effectively.
5. When online registration is eventually implemented, use of digital certificates by the registering elector should be the norm.
6. Data matching or data sharing with other public bodies, online or offline, should be done securely, comply with data privacy laws, and be covered by formal agreements.
7. Where electoral data matching is done online, thought should be given as to how to secure the data.
8. Similarly, if data is shared offline by means of CD or memory stick, the government should apply lessons learnt in the numerous reviews conducted into data loss incidents in recent years.
9. The Government should consider the advantages or otherwise of data matching with private sector databases.
10. To encourage registration of expatriate electors, the government might consider using the Foreign and Commonwealth Office's consular facilities to encourage and facilitate registration overseas.
11. To improve the registration of 'lost' voters, the government might consider linking electoral registration to the application for benefits or to registration on other public databases.
12. Management of electoral data must comply with data privacy laws.
13. ISO 27001 should be adopted in as an information security management system standard.⁶⁹

⁶⁹ [Individual Voter Registration: Lessons from Overseas](#), EURIM (The Information Society Alliance) March 2011, updated May 2011.

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