



House of Commons
Political and Constitutional
Reform Committee

Voter engagement in the UK: follow up

Sixth Report of Session 2014–15



House of Commons
Political and Constitutional
Reform Committee

**Voter engagement in
the UK: follow up**

Sixth Report of Session 2014–15

*Report, together with formal minutes relating
to the report*

*Ordered by the House of Commons
to be printed 2 February 2015*

HC 938

Published on 5 February 2015
by authority of the House of Commons
London: The Stationery Office Limited
£0.00

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee

The Political and Constitutional Reform Committee is appointed by the House of Commons to consider political and constitutional reform.

Current membership

[Mr Graham Allen MP](#) (Labour, Nottingham North) (Chair)
[Mr Christopher Chope MP](#) (Conservative, Christchurch)
[Tracey Crouch MP](#) (Conservative, Chatham and Aylesford)
[Mark Durkan MP](#) (Social Democratic & Labour Party, Foyle)
[Paul Flynn MP](#) (Labour, Newport West)
[Duncan Hames MP](#) (Liberal Democrat, Chippenham)
[Fabian Hamilton MP](#) (Labour, Leeds North East)
[David Morris MP](#) (Conservative, Morecambe and Lunesdale)
[Robert Neill MP](#) (Conservative, Bromley and Chislehurst)
[Chris Ruane MP](#) (Labour, Vale of Clwyd)
[Mr Andrew Turner MP](#) (Conservative, Isle of Wight)

The following Members were also members of the Committee during the Parliament:

[Mr Jeremy Browne MP](#) (Liberal Democrat, Taunton Deane)
[Sheila Gilmore MP](#) (Labour, Edinburgh East)
[Andrew Griffiths MP](#) (Conservative, Burton)
[Simon Hart MP](#) (Conservative, Camarthen West and South Pembrokeshire)
[Tristram Hunt MP](#) (Labour, Stoke on Trent Central)
[Mrs Eleanor Laing MP](#) (Conservative, Epping Forest)
[Yasmin Qureshi MP](#) (Labour, Bolton South East)
[Stephen Williams MP](#) (Liberal Democrat, Bristol West)

Powers

The Committee's powers are set out in House of Commons Standing Orders, principally in Temporary Standing Order (Political and Constitutional Reform Committee). These are available on the Internet via www.publications.parliament.uk/pa/cm/cmstords.htm

Publication

Committee reports are published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/PCRC-publications and by The Stationery Office by Order of the House.

Evidence relating to this report is published on the Committee's website at www.parliament.uk/voter-reform

Committee staff

The current staff of the Committee are Martyn Atkins (Clerk), Edward Faulkner (Committee Specialist), Ami Cochrane (Legal Assistant), Tony Catinella (Senior Committee Assistant), James Camp (Committee Assistant), Nerys Davies (Campaign Co-ordinator) and Jessica Bridges-Palmer (Media Officer).

Contacts

All correspondence should be addressed to the Clerk of the Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, House of Commons, 14 Tothill Street, London SW1H 9NB. The telephone number for general enquiries is 020 7219 0737; the Committee's email address is pcrc@parliament.uk

Contents

Report	<i>Page</i>
Summary	3
1 Introduction	5
The problem	5
Our consultation on voter engagement	5
This report	7
2 Reasons for low levels of voter engagement	8
Negative views of politicians and politics	8
Political parties	9
The role of the media	9
The value of voting	10
Where power lies	11
Conclusion	12
3 Recent developments	13
Individual Electoral Registration	13
Where things were in November 2014	13
The situation now	13
End of transitional arrangements	14
Additional funding for electoral registration	15
Electoral fraud	17
Conclusion	17
4 Unequal registration and participation	18
Young people and students	18
People with disabilities	18
Overseas voters	19
Citizens of Commonwealth countries and other EU member states	21
Conclusion	22
5 Improving electoral registration	23
An obligation to register to vote	23
Automatic registration	24
The open register	25
National Voter Registration Day	26
Prompting people to register to vote	26
Registration at schools, colleges and universities	28
Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)	29
The role of EROs	29
Performance standards for EROs	30
Recognising notable successes	30
House to house canvassing	31
Freedom of Information	31
Conclusion	32
Electoral Commission targets	32

6	Improving voter turnout	34
	Registering closer to or on Election Day	34
	Elections at the weekend or on a public holiday	37
	Online voting	39
	Postal voting and all-postal elections	41
	Public awareness and the provision of information	43
	Votes for 16 and 17 year olds	44
	Citizenship education	47
	Compulsory voting	47
	None of the above	49
	Electoral reform	51
	Conclusion	52
7	Conclusion	54
	Lessons from the Scottish referendum	54
	Other matters arising	55
	Need for action	56
	Conclusions and recommendations	58
	Annex 1: Meeting with youth groups	68
	Annex 2: Issues raised in correspondence	69
	Reasons for not registering to vote	69
	Reasons for not voting	69
	Proposals for change	69
	Opposition to possible changes	71
	Annex 3: Discussion on social media	72
	Annex 4: Survey results	73
	Annex 5: Hansard Society question on encouraging participation in future elections	74
	Formal Minutes	75
	Published written evidence	76
	Unpublished evidence	79
	List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament	80

Summary

Following our interim report on voter engagement, which we published in November 2014, and the substantial public consultation we ran subsequently, we have now brought forward our final report on reengaging the public with elections in the UK.

Our key recommendations are:

- That the Government bring forward plans to target those groups—including young people, British citizens living overseas and people with disabilities—who are currently least likely to be registered to vote.
- That the Government consider improvements to electoral registration—including making registration automatic, prompting people to register to vote when they access other public services, and registering young people in schools, colleges and universities.
- That changes to electoral arrangements—including online voting, registering closer to or on Election Day and holding elections at the weekend—be piloted in the next Parliament with a view to making permanent changes to electoral arrangements ahead of the 2020 general election.

We recognise that the main reasons for low levels of voter engagement are political, and serious action needs to be taken by political parties, individual politicians and the Government to engage more effectively with the public, and convince them of the value of voting if the public is to be re-engaged not just with elections, but politics more broadly.

1 Introduction

The problem

1. **Democracy in the UK is working less well than it used to and we need to move swiftly to pre-empt a crisis. Millions of people are missing from the UK's electoral registers; at the most recent estimate, 7.5 million people are not correctly registered to vote. Many of those who are registered to vote—and in many elections the majority—choose not to participate at elections, be they for the UK Parliament, local government, or the European Parliament. At the last general election almost 16 million registered voters, 34.9% of the electorate, chose not to participate, more than voted for candidates of any one major party. Include the number of people who are not correctly registered to vote in this figure, and the number of people who did not participate was greater than the number of votes cast for candidates of the two largest parties, or of both of the Coalition parties. That was the election which recorded the highest proportion of registered voters—65.1%—turning out at any UK election to take place in the 21st century—although turnout for the recent Scottish independence referendum was 84.6%.**

2. **This is not a new problem, but it is one that has gone unaddressed for too long. In a modern democracy, it is unacceptable that millions of people who are eligible to vote are missing from electoral registers. It is desirable in a representative democracy for turnout at elections of all kinds to be higher—and ideally far higher—than has been the case in recent years. It is essential that the scale of the response is equal to the task. Aside from these purely arithmetic measures of voter engagement, there is clearly also a serious problem around disengagement from, and dissatisfaction with, politics more broadly.**

Our consultation on voter engagement

3. **On 14 November 2014 we published an interim report on voter engagement in the UK.¹ This explored the reasons for current low levels of voter engagement and considered how the problem could be addressed. Our interim report reached 47 conclusions and made 35 recommendations, covering a broad range of areas relevant to the question of voter engagement in the UK. These included the structure of political parties, public dissatisfaction with politics and politicians, where power lies across the UK, arrangements for electoral registration and the options available for voters to participate at elections. The range and breadth of conclusions and recommendations indicate the level of action we believe is necessary. The Government welcomed our interim report and agreed with us that improving voter engagement is vital to the long term well-being of democracy in the**

1 Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, [Voter engagement in the UK](#), HC 232

UK.² The responses we received from the Conservatives, Labour, Liberal Democrats and Greens also welcomed our interim report and the work we had done on this subject.³

4. Our interim report dealt with some controversial issues and considered several radical changes, such as making voting compulsory and enabling people to vote online. We also called on the Government and individual political parties to take action to re-engage the electorate. So as to give the public the opportunity to have a say on the proposals we have considered, we put our interim report out for public consultation. To facilitate this process, we have engaged with the public in a variety of ways, including:

- Calling for written responses to our interim report;⁴
- Promoting a survey with questions on several of the proposals we are considering;⁵
- Holding an informal meeting with youth groups;⁶
- Inviting the views of party leaders,⁷ and
- Hosting an informal chat on Twitter.⁸

5. Several of those who submitted evidence to us did so on the basis of their own surveys, and these results have been considered in addition to those we received directly.⁹ In total, we received over 100 pieces of written evidence, over 15,000 responses to our survey and other related surveys, dozens of comments on social media and well over 100 pieces of correspondence.¹⁰ Our report has also been informed by research conducted by the Hansard Society which, as part of its annual Audit of Political Engagement, has asked members of the public which changes to electoral arrangements they would support with a view to increasing participation at elections.¹¹

6. Many thousands of people have given us their views on voter engagement. These responses are particularly important to our deliberations on this subject, because the views of the public must be central to any discussion around electoral arrangements. It was for this reason we produced an interim report in November 2014, with a view to

2 Political and Constitutional Reform Committee, Fourth Special Report of Session 2014–15, Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, HC 1037, page 1

3 Written evidence from Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party [PVE 116], Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition [PVE 123], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Policy Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106] and the Green Party for England and Wales [PVE 96]

4 A full list of written submissions published by the Committee is available on page 73.

5 The headline results of the survey are available on page 70 as Annex 4, and the full data set of the Committee’s survey results has been published on our website here: [PCRC survey results](#)

6 A note of the informal meeting with youth groups is available on page 65 as Annex 1.

7 The Committee received responses from Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party [PVE 116], Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition [PVE 123], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Policy Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106] and the Green Party for England and Wales [PVE 96].

8 A note of points raised on social media is available on page 69 as Annex 3.

9 Organisations to host surveys were Unlock Democracy [PVE 111], Bite the Ballot [PVE 115], 38 Degrees [PVE 126]

10 A note of many of the points raised in correspondence to the Committee is available on page 66 as Annex 2.

11 The results for the question asked by the Hansard Society are available on page 71 as Annex 5.

consulting the public before bringing forward our final report. We are extremely grateful for all of the responses we received, whether by e-mail, letter, social media, formal written submission or survey response. These have been invaluable to informing our deliberations and helping us refine the conclusions and recommendations presented here.

7. As part of our consultation we wrote to the leader of each party represented at the House of Commons asking for their views on our interim report. We received responses from the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party. These responses are extremely welcome, and we hope demonstrate a commitment on the part of those parties to take improving voter engagement seriously.

This report

8. The intention of this report is to set out the responses we received during our consultation, and our revised conclusions and recommendations where these have changed since we produced our interim report. The areas where our conclusions and recommendations have changed are mainly those where the response to our consultation has indicated there is strong support for, or opposition to, one of the proposals we considered. Where a conclusion or recommendation from our interim report stands, we have stated this.

2 Reasons for low levels of voter engagement

9. In our interim report we explored several reasons for the current low levels of voter engagement.¹² The main reasons we concluded were responsible for the current low levels of engagement with elections, as well as politics more broadly, were:

- Negative views of politicians;
- Disengagement with politics more broadly;
- How political parties are structured;
- The role of the media;
- The value of voting; and
- Where power lies in the UK.

The views expressed in response to our consultation are set out below, and we have refined our conclusions and recommendations in the light of these representations.

Negative views of politicians and politics

10. We noted in our interim report that there were broad negative stereotypes about Parliament and Government which we felt went beyond healthy cynicism and, if unaddressed, could undermine the basis of our representative democracy.¹³ Several responses to our interim report highlighted dissatisfaction with politicians, political parties and the political system more broadly as a reason for low levels of engagement with elections. Points that were raised with us include:

- There is a lack of choice available to voters, and parties are too similar;¹⁴
- Politicians are not representative of the public;¹⁵
- There is a lack of trust in and a poor view of politicians and political parties;¹⁶
- The power of the Executive and parties is too great.¹⁷

12 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 11–40

13 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 15

14 Written evidence from Mary Beton [[PVE 04](#)], David Bowes [[PVE 05](#)], A K Hart [[PVE 60](#)], Mr Christopher Heyes [[PVE 86](#)], [PCRC survey results](#)

15 Written evidence from David Bowes [[PVE 05](#)], Nigel Siederer [[PVE 65](#)]

16 Written evidence from Sean Wallace [[PVE 03](#)], Roger Edward Doran [[PVE 14](#)], John Cartwright [[PVE 16](#)], Phillip Barnes [[PVE 40](#)], Jackie Terry [[PVE 70](#)], Southern Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 89](#)]

17 Written evidence from David Bowes [[PVE 05](#)], Gordon Sheppard [[PVE 45](#)], correspondence received by the Committee [Annex 2], [PCRC survey results](#)

These points are very much in line with the evidence we received ahead of producing our interim report.

Political parties

11. Our interim report concluded that the structure of political parties should be reconsidered with a view to better engaging with the public, and also recommended that talks around the funding of political parties be resumed, to address concerns about present arrangements.¹⁸ These are both issues that respondents to our consultation highlighted as issues affecting how people engage with voting.¹⁹ Both the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform and the Green Party for England and Wales welcomed our recommendation that all-party talks on party funding be resumed.²⁰ The evidence from the Green Party for England and Wales highlighted its “bottom up” decision-making process, the fact that candidates were chosen by local members and that elected representatives of the party were not subject to whipping.²¹ Bite the Ballot has called for parties to go “back to the drawing board” to look at how their members and the public can be empowered to craft and decide policy, and also to stand for election.²² The Government has told us that it “is now clear that reforms [to party funding] cannot go forward in this Parliament” but that it hoped that “the principles explored [in this Parliament] can inform further discussions on this topic and that the parties will then return to this issue after the General Election.”²³

12. It is disappointing that the Government has decided the issue of party funding will not be considered further until after the General Election. This is an issue which has gone unresolved for too long, and further delay is not acceptable. We look to an early resolution to this issue in the next Parliament.

The role of the media

13. Our interim report noted the essential role of the media in informing the public about political news, but raised concerns that the focus of the media on negative news stories and “the very worst of party politics” could have an adverse impact on public engagement with politics and, therefore, elections. Several responses to our consultation addressed the role of the media in relation to voter engagement and coverage of politics more broadly, with the majority raising concerns about the focus of the media on conflict and a number of

18 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 21-22

19 On party structures: Written evidence from Dr Christopher Pogson [[PVE 27](#)], Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]. On funding of political parties: Dr Christopher Pogson [[PVE 27](#)], Peter Davidson [[PVE 66](#)], Robert Copeland [[PVE 68](#)], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

20 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)], Green Party for England and Wales [[PVE 96](#)]

21 Written evidence from the Green Party for England and Wales [[PVE 96](#)]

22 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

23 [Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15](#), page 2

submissions also addressing negative effects of “spin” and misinformation.²⁴ We note that Bite the Ballot recently hosted a series of online discussions between young voters and leaders of the main political parties, an initiative that allowed the public to engage with politicians away from the influence of the mainstream media.²⁵ Similarly, the Digital Debate consortium—an initiative comprising YouTube, the Guardian and the Telegraph—has suggested that an online leaders’ debate is the “logical progression to build on the success of the 2010 television debates”, stating that “the interactivity enabled by digital technology provides the opportunity for far greater engagement and participation in the democratic process”, particularly for young people.²⁶

The value of voting

14. Our interim report noted that several witnesses believed many people had concerns about the value of voting, particularly because of the electoral system used for general and local elections—the First Past the Post (FPTP) system. We were told that this electoral system could have a negative impact on the value of individual votes and therefore people’s perception of how worthwhile voting was.²⁷ A large number of responses to our consultation, including the evidence we received from the Green Party for England and Wales, reinforced the evidence we received previously, highlighted the adverse impact the FPTP electoral system for parliamentary elections had on the value of voting for many electors.²⁸ By way of example, one respondent to our consultation stated in relation to the electoral system: “I do not want to be a disengaged voter, but the system effectively disengages me.”²⁹

15. A variety of voting systems are currently used for different types of election across the UK, including:

- First Past the Post: Voters pick one candidate and the candidate with the most votes is elected (used for general elections and local elections in England and Wales).
- Single Transferable Vote: Voters rank candidates in preference and any candidate receiving the necessary number of votes to be elected (the quota) is elected, and any surplus votes are transferred to the remaining candidates. If a candidate does not meet the quota they are eliminated and ballots cast for them are transferred according to the

24 Written evidence from Mary Beton [PVE 04], Adam Bastock [PVE 18], Dr Christopher Pogson [PVE 27], Peter Davidson [PVE 66], Southern Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 89], the Green Party for England and Wales [PVE 96]

25 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [PVE 115]

26 Written evidence from the Digital Debate Consortium [PVE 121]

27 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 32-33

28 Written evidence from Mary Beton [PVE 04], David Bowes [PVE 05], Angus Geddes [PVE 11], Kevin Cleary [PVE 26], Martin Warner [PVE 29], John Cross [PVE 53], Thomas G F Gray [PVE 56], Dr Vere Smyth [PVE 57], Michael Meadowcroft [PVE 63], Nigel Siederer [PVE 65], Peter Davidson [PVE 66], Ross Lloyd [PVE 67], Norman Day [PVE 71], Anthony Tuffin [PVE 73], Jim Halcrow [PVE 82], Dr James Gilmour [PVE 84], Keith Underhill [PVE 85], Mr Christopher Heyes [PVE 86], Make Votes Count in West Sussex [PVE 92], STV Action [PVE 94], the Green Party for England and Wales [PVE 96], David Green [PVE 99], [PCRC survey results](#)

29 Written evidence from Nigel Siederer [PVE 65]

voter's preferences (used for electing the Northern Ireland Assembly, local elections in Scotland and Northern Ireland and European Parliament elections in Northern Ireland).

- **Supplementary Vote:** Voters pick a first and second candidate and the winner is the candidate that receives either 50% of first preference votes or, if no one meets this criteria, the candidate that has most votes after all but the top two candidates are eliminated and second preference votes distributed (used to elect the Mayor of London and other elected mayors).
- **Additional Member System:** Voters cast two votes, one for an individual candidate—who is elected under First Past the Post—and one for a party—where representatives are elected proportionally to represent a larger area (used to elect the Scottish Parliament, the National Assembly for Wales and the London Assembly).
- **Closed Party List:** Voters pick the party they wish to support and each party gets the number of seats in proportion to the number of votes it has received in each constituency (used for elections to the European Parliament, except in Northern Ireland).³⁰

16. A large number of respondents to our consultation felt that the First Past the Post electoral system disenfranchised them, and meant that for them it was not worth voting. It is hard to dispute that in safe seats, where the incumbent has a large majority and the party of the elected representative is unlikely to change at a general election, there is a reduced incentive to participate at elections. This can only have a negative impact on voter engagement. We note that a wide range of electoral systems are already in use for various elections that take place across the UK, and the supremacy of one particular electoral system should therefore not be presumed.

Where power lies

17. Our interim report considered the impact that centralisation of power in the UK had on voter engagement, and concluded that this could only have an adverse effect on how people engaged with elections, and local politics in particular. We also received several comments stating that people felt there was less reason to vote when so many decisions were perceived to have been made at EU level. Several respondents to our consultation made similar points.³¹ The evidence we received from the Chairman of the Conservative Party highlighted the importance they believe these issues had for voter engagement, stating: “First and foremost, we believe that a crucial part of increasing voter engagement lies in giving powers back to communities.” He stated that a lack of accountability and choice at a local level had resulted in political disenfranchisement and that the Conservatives in government had sought to redress this through devolution, localism and

30 [Voting systems in the UK](#), Parliament

31 Written evidence from David Bowes [[PVE 05](#)], Isaac Ingram [[PVE 07](#)], Barry E Thomas [[PVE 20](#)], Avtar Singh [[PVE 23](#)], Phillip Barnes [[PVE 40](#)], Professor Tom McGuffog [[PVE 61](#)], Peter Davidson [[PVE 66](#)], Jim Halcrow [[PVE 82](#)], [PCRC survey results](#)

City Deals.³² The Green Party for England and Wales told us that they deemed the principle of decision making at the lowest possible level to be important at all levels of society, stating that the current lack of power at local authority level is “undemocratic and a disincentive for voters at council elections.”³³

18. Debates around devolution are now particularly relevant to the question of voter engagement, as proposals for further powers to be devolved to Scotland include those relating to elections and the franchise, with discussions ongoing about the possibility of similar proposals being extended to Wales. The Smith Commission’s report on the further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament stated: “The Scottish Parliament will have all powers in relation to elections to the Scottish Parliament and local government elections in Scotland”,³⁴ and the Government has now published draft clauses for a Scotland Bill to give effect to this proposal.³⁵ The Wales Act 2014 empowers the Welsh Assembly to decide whether 16 and 17 year olds would be eligible to participate on any referendum on the commencement of income tax provisions contained in the Act.³⁶

Conclusion

19. With respect to the reasons for current low levels of voter engagement, the conclusions and recommendations in paragraphs 15 to 40 of our interim report stand, although we have expanded above on the concerns that have been expressed about the value of voting. We hope the additional evidence we have received on these points, as set out above, will inform progress on these issues.

32 Written evidence from Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party [[PVE 116](#)]

33 Written evidence from the Green Party for England and Wales [[PVE 96](#)]

34 [Report of the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament](#), The Smith Commission, 27 November 2014

35 [Scotland in the United Kingdom: An enduring settlement](#), Cm 8990, HM Government, January 2015

36 Wales Act 2014, [Schedule 1](#)

3 Recent developments

Individual Electoral Registration

20. Our interim report looked closely at the ongoing transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER), a new system of electoral registration where each individual voter registers to vote individually, and supplies identifying information such as their date of birth and National Insurance number, rather than being registered by the head of the household. IER went live in England and Wales on 10 June 2014 and in Scotland on 19 September 2014 (Individual Electoral Registration has been operating in Northern Ireland since 2002). The transition to IER is the most significant change to electoral administration in decades, and was pursued with a view to tackling electoral fraud and increasing confidence in the integrity of the electoral register.

Where things were in November 2014

21. When we published our interim report in November 2014, the transition to IER was at an early stage. Online registration had gone live and as of 18 October 2014 there had been 1.8 million applications to register to vote. Data matching—the process of using publicly held data to confirm previously registered voters on to the new electoral register—had been used in England and Wales to confirm approximately 36.9 million voters on to the new registers, with 5.5 million entries not then confirmed. A particular issue that had arisen was the confirmation rate for 16 and 17 year olds,³⁷ which was only 52% (as compared to 87% in total).

The situation now

22. Over 4 million applications to register to vote have been made since the launch of IER, with the vast majority of these applications being made online. The Electoral Commission has also reported on the confirmation process in Scotland, where 3.6 million entries were confirmed, but 590,000 were not positively matched.³⁸ This means the overall match rate for Great Britain was 87%, equivalent to 40.5 million confirmed register entries. The Electoral Commission is due to publish a report in February 2015 on the progress of the transition to IER in England and Wales, which it says will “assess how the transition has progressed from the end of the confirmation exercise up to the publication of the revised registers”.³⁹ Bite the Ballot has told us that this report cannot come soon enough, stating: “The outlook, as regards already low levels of incorrectly ‘matched’ attainers and students, is grim and extremely concerning.”⁴⁰ The Leader of the Opposition told us that “Labour is deeply concerned about the pace of the transition to IER and the effect this will have on the democratic deficit” and “the recent register has seen a 1 million decrease over the last year

37 16 and 17 year olds who will turn 18 during the period an electoral register is in force are eligible to register to vote.

38 [Analysis of the confirmation live run in Scotland](#), Electoral Commission, November 2014

39 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

40 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

as the introduction of IER has begun to affect results.”⁴¹ The Green Party for England and Wales told us that they were “especially disturbed that students and young people will be adversely affected unless they are expressly informed and encouraged to register”, and supported the suggestion that registration should be available to students in schools and colleges.⁴² They also recommended a widespread government sponsored media campaign to raise awareness and encourage registration amongst young people and students. The Government has told us that “there is no room for complacency” on this issue and that it “remains committed to ensuring every eligible voter is registered and can exercise their democratic right at the ballot box.”⁴³

23. In our interim report we recommended that Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) make every effort to reach voters who have not been automatically transferred to the new register. To that end Bite the Ballot has suggested some “easy, engaging and efficient methods of registration”, which are:

- taking part in National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) 2015;
- undertaking voter registration (or engagement) sessions in every local school and further education college, and
- better use of targeted advertising via social media to locate specific groups of under-registered people.⁴⁴

End of transitional arrangements

24. The Electoral Registration Act 2013 makes transitional arrangements for voters to remain on the electoral register until December 2016 even if they are not either confirmed onto the new register via data matching or registered individually. In December 2016 those individuals who had been kept on the register under transitional arrangements would be removed. The legislation also provides the Government with the option of bringing forward to December 2015 the date on which these transitional arrangements will end— affecting eligibility to vote ahead of the elections in May 2016 for the Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly, the Mayor of London, and various local elections. The Electoral Commission will report in June 2015 on the effectiveness of the transition to IER up to that point, with a view to informing the decision of whether to bring forward the end date for transitional arrangements.⁴⁵ The Commission has stated:

The range of polls scheduled for 2016 means that everywhere in Great Britain will have elections on 5 May 2016 and we would want to be satisfied that particular areas are not likely to have significantly worse levels of registration

41 Written evidence from Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition [[PVE 123](#)]

42 Written evidence from the Green Party for England and Wales [[PVE 96](#)]

43 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 3

44 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

45 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

than others before making any recommendation on bringing forward the end point of the transition.⁴⁶

When we spoke to Sam Gyimah MP, Minister for the Constitution, in January 2015, he told us:

The Electoral Commission will come out with its assessment and the Government at the time will have to act on that basis.⁴⁷

Similarly, the Government's response to our interim report stated:

It is for the next Government and Parliament to make the decision, following the advice and assessment of the Electoral Commission, as to whether the transition should conclude at the end of 2015 or at some stage during 2016. We anticipate that the completeness and accuracy of the registers will be at the centre of these deliberations.⁴⁸

25. The evidence we received from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform supported the implementation of IER. With regard to the decision by the next Government as to whether to bring forward the end of transitional arrangements for IER, they stated:

In light of the considerable work needed to ensure hard-to-reach groups are registered individually, and the impacts on boundary changes, we consider it very unlikely that an early end to carryover will be appropriate.⁴⁹

Brent Council has also told us they agree with our recommendation that “the Government not bring forward the end date for the transitional arrangements to IER unless electoral registers are successfully updated and that adequate arrangements are put in place to boost registration.”⁵⁰ The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration stressed “the need to ensure a successful (i.e. improvement on figures pre-IER) transition before bringing forward the end date of the transitional arrangements concerning IER.”⁵¹

Additional funding for electoral registration

26. In July 2013 the Government announced that it was making £4.2 million available to maximise voter registration.⁵² We considered the distribution of these funds in our interim report, and recommended that the Government look favourably on requests for additional

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ Oral evidence taken on [12 January 2015](#), HC (2014-15) 600, Q132 [Sam Gyimah MP]

⁴⁸ Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 4

⁴⁹ Written evidence from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

⁵⁰ Written evidence from Brent Council [[PVE 49](#)]

⁵¹ Written evidence from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration [[PVE 114](#)]

⁵² [Funding for new ways to encourage voter registration](#), Gov.uk, 5 February 2014

funding, which we felt was likely to be necessary.⁵³ The Association of Electoral Administrators welcomed this recommendation, and told us that in order to reach all registered voters who have not been automatically transferred to the new register, “Electoral Registration Officers will need funding and resources to carry out a mini canvass early in the New Year.”⁵⁴

27. The Government announced in January 2015 that a further £9.8 million would be made available to maximise voter registration.⁵⁵ The majority of funds (£6.8 million) are to be distributed to local authorities to support the work of Electoral Registration Officers, while some funds will be used for wider activities including those directed at enabling specific under-registered groups such as students, overseas electors and armed service personnel to register to vote. The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform told us that they strongly welcomed the announcement of additional funding to maximise voter registration, and stated that it was right that this money is being focused on those groups most at risk of under registration.⁵⁶ The Government’s response to our interim report also addressed the additional funding, stating: “In line with the Committee’s recommendation, this funding package consists of a number of components that will support efforts to improve registration among different types of electors and under registered groups.”⁵⁷ Bite the Ballot told us that they looked forward to learning how to apply for this funding, and that progress on this “couldn’t come quickly enough”.⁵⁸

28. In our interim report we recommended that the Electoral Commission look into service level agreements with agencies, bodies and organisations which had a proven track record of increasing electoral registration, to which the Commission responded that its focus had been to engage with a wide variety of partners to reach groups that were not currently registered, and to provide non-financial support to partner organisations.⁵⁹

29. In a time of austerity it is vital that funding for elections is protected. We welcome the additional £9.8 million the Government has made available to maximise registration during the transition to IER, particularly in light of our recommendation that the Government should look favourably on requests for additional funding. Now this funding has been made available, it is important that it is distributed to those organisations which can most effectively maximise registration ahead of the general election. We recommend that the Government move with speed to make these new funds for maximising electoral registration available, and report back to Parliament before Dissolution with further details of how those funds which are not being allocated to local authorities are to be distributed. We also recommend that the Government should

53 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 58-59

54 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 72](#)]

55 HC Deb, 9 January 2015, [col 18WS](#)

56 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

57 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 3

58 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

59 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

recognise the possibility that further funding will be necessary to support the implementation of IER and to ensure that electoral registers are maintained and enhanced in the future, and that it should be prepared to allocate further funds if a proven need is demonstrated.

Electoral fraud

30. Our interim report considered the importance of electoral fraud in relation to the question of voter engagement. We concluded that, given the need to address the current low levels of voter engagement, it was important that any measures to address electoral fraud were proportionate to the scale of the problem and that consideration be given to the impact such measures could have on legitimate voters. A number of respondents to our consultation addressed the Electoral Commission's proposal that voters be required to present photographic identification at polling stations, with most responses which addressed the issue arguing against the proposal.⁶⁰ The Government told us that it had not seen "any evidence to suggest that personation at polling stations is significant problem that needs to be addressed by the introduction of an ID requirement at polling stations" and that it was "not convinced that introducing a photographic ID requirement on a national basis is a necessary or proportionate response, and believe it could potentially disenfranchise significant numbers of legitimate voters."⁶¹ The Electoral Commission has stated that it has "found little evidence to suggest that the identity-checking scheme applied in Northern Ireland presents difficulties for people in terms of accessibility", but that it was "undertaking further consultation and analysis to identify a proportionate and accessible scheme for verifying identity at polling stations in Great Britain."⁶² The Commission expects to report details of its recommendation shortly after the 2015 general election.

Conclusion

31. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, made in paragraphs 51 to 59 of our interim report, concerning the transition to IER and the Electoral Commission's proposals for combatting electoral fraud.

60 Written evidence from Brent Council [[PVE 49](#)], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

61 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 4

62 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

4 Unequal registration and participation

32. Our interim report considered the unequal levels of both registration and participation at elections across many groups—with young people, private tenants, British citizens living overseas, EU and Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK and members of certain Black and Minority Ethnic groups all being less likely to be registered to vote and to turn out at elections. Many of those who responded to our survey stated their support for efforts to do more to increase registration of people from those groups which are currently under-represented on the electoral register, and we received a significant response from people arguing for more to be done to engage young people with elections.⁶³ Reaching out to under-represented groups is also an area the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy considered, recommending that new online activities should be targeted and should engage specific groups who are not currently engaged in democratic processes.⁶⁴ This recommendation very much reflects the approach we set out in our interim report. We do not here restate all of the evidence that we received previously, but have included new comments that have been made to us by respondents to our consultation.

Young people and students

33. Both the National Union of Students and Bite the Ballot told us that they do not agree that young people are apathetic about politics.⁶⁵ This confirmed the views that had been expressed to us previously. Bite the Ballot told us that “the teenagers, students and young people we meet care deeply about issues and all have opinions about ‘political’ issues.” Bite the Ballot has said that politicians need to engage with young people and demonstrate that they care about young people’s issues, something that has not happened in the past.⁶⁶

People with disabilities

34. Our interim report concluded that there was a particular problem with the accessibility of registration and voting for a large number of people with specific needs resulting from a disability. We recommended that the Government consult with the Electoral Commission, EROs and disability groups and publish clear and stretching proposals setting out how registration and voting will be made more accessible to people with disabilities.⁶⁷ The Government has told us that it is “committed to making the electoral system fully accessible for all electors”, and stated that in November 2014 it had held meetings with

63 Written evidence from John Hemming [PVE 10], Barry E Thomas [PVE 20], Brent Council [PVE 49], Nigel Siederer [PVE 65], Peter Davidson [PVE 66], Jackie Terry [PVE 70], Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106]

64 [Open Up!](#), Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy, January 2014

65 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [PVE 115], National Union Students [PVE 117]

66 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [PVE 115]

67 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 84

Mencap and the RNIB to identify options for making registration and voting easier for people with disabilities.⁶⁸ The Government also stated that “Further work to bring forward proposals to improve the accessibility of the electoral system for disabled people remains ongoing.”

35. The Papworth Trust, a charity which supports disabled people, suggested that local authorities should pilot various options to see what would be most helpful to increasing access for disabled people. They told us that polling stations should be made more accessible, options for voting such as online voting should be considered as a means to making it easier for people with disabilities to vote, and work to promote registration by organisations such as Mencap should continue.⁶⁹ Dimensions, a charity that supports people with learning disabilities and autism, highlighted that there was a specific issue around understanding the eligibility to vote of people with certain disabilities, and stated that this needed to be clarified.⁷⁰ Bite the Ballot drew our attention to a campaign it had run jointly with MDC Trailblazers, a national network of more than 400 young disabled people, looking at access to polling stations. The results of this campaign could inform improvements to accessibility of polling stations in the future.⁷¹

36. We welcome the actions that the Government has undertaken to identify options for making registration and voting easier for people with disabilities, but we note that these fall short of meeting the recommendation we made that the Government publish clear and stretching proposals setting out how registration and voting will be made more accessible to people with disabilities.

Overseas voters

37. In our interim report we explored levels of voter engagement for British citizens living overseas—who are eligible to vote in general and European Parliament elections for 15 years after they move overseas from the UK—and noted that only 15,818 of the estimated 4.7 to 5.5 million British citizens living overseas were registered to vote.⁷² We called on the Government to bring forward a comprehensive plan to increase registration rates for this group.⁷³ The Government has told us that it “remains committed to maximise registration amongst all groups, including overseas electors and is already working to achieve this ahead of the 2015 General Election.”⁷⁴ It stated that some measures that had already been introduced, such as online registration and the extension the electoral timetable for UK Parliamentary elections from 17 to 25 days, were particularly helpful to overseas voters. The Government’s response to our interim report also stated that “The requirement for

68 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 5

69 Written evidence from the Papworth Trust [[PVE 64](#)]

70 Written evidence from Dimensions [[PVE 109](#)]

71 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

72 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 85

73 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 90

74 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 6

overseas electors to have a witness for their application to register has also been removed, which will make it a more straightforward process.”

38. A large number of respondents to our consultation called for the abolition of the rule which disenfranchises British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years,⁷⁵ a call supported by the evidence we received from the Chairman of the Conservative Party.⁷⁶ Arguments made in favour of allowing British citizens overseas to retain their voting rights indefinitely included that policy decisions made in the UK—particularly around issues such as pensions—continued to affect this group, and that many of them were likely to retain a strong attachment to the UK. Conversely, the evidence from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform stated that it “seems to us irrational in the extreme that an elector who has moved abroad should continue to elect a local MP in the community they have left for up to 15 years thereafter.”⁷⁷ Measures to remove the 15 year restriction on British citizens living overseas from voting, to create an obligation for the Electoral Commission to identify and facilitate the registration of British citizens living overseas, and to enable such citizens to vote using the internet have recently been proposed in the Overseas Voters Bill, which was debated at Second Reading on 23 January 2015.⁷⁸

39. It was also suggested to us that efforts should be made to contact British citizens living abroad via newspapers and digests that are most likely to reach them, to encourage them to register to vote.⁷⁹ New Europeans also told us that the “value of working with voluntary sector organisations and/or their potential reach should not be under-estimated.”⁸⁰ Although we received evidence to suggest that online registration would be beneficial to British voters living overseas,⁸¹ respondents did state that more needed to be done to publicise eligibility and the process for registering to vote.⁸² One specific suggestion was that people could be prompted to register to vote when they applied for a passport.⁸³ Support was also given to the proposal that overseas voters be sent a ballot paper by e-mail, which could then be printed out and returned by post.⁸⁴

75 Written evidence from Roger Manley [PVE 41], Jaqueline Freeman [PVE 44], Mrs P M Handslip [PVE 46], Pensioners Debut Stand Up [PVE 47], Michael Blackmore [PVE 48], Andrew Smith [PVE 51], Anthony Douglas Dubbins [PVE 54], Labour International [PVE 88], Vince Smeaton [PVE 102], British Community Committee of France [PVE 107], [PCRC survey results](#)

76 Written evidence from Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party [PVE 116]

77 Written evidence from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106]

78 [Overseas Voters Bill](#), Bill 49, and HC Deb, 21 January 2015, [col 521](#): the motion for Second Reading was withdrawn at the end of the debate.

79 Mrs P M Handslip [PVE 46]

80 Written evidence from New Europeans [PVE 111]

81 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81], Labour International [PVE 88], British Community Committee of France [PVE 107], Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party [PVE 116]

82 Written evidence from the British Community Committee of France [PVE 107]

83 Written evidence from the British Community Committee of France [PVE 107]

84 Written evidence from the British Community Committee of France [PVE 107]

40. The Electoral Commission has run campaigns targeted at overseas voters for a number of years and plans to run one prior to the General Election in May 2015. The Commission told us that its campaign will primarily be online, with some additional media work, and will be targeted at countries where the evidence suggests the highest numbers of UK expatriates reside.⁸⁵ The Commission believed that the new system of online registration should make it easier and simpler for eligible overseas electors to register; it intends to register at least 100,000 overseas electors before the registration deadline for participating in the May 2015 general election. The Chairman of the Conservative Party has also told us that in government the Conservatives have made efforts to increase voter engagement of the estimated 5.5 million British citizens living overseas, and in addition stated: “the Prime Minister has pledged to abolish the 15 year rule which disqualifies many British citizens living abroad from voting.”⁸⁶

41. *The proposal for removing the current 15-year limit on British citizens living overseas from participating in UK elections should be considered as part of a wider package of measures aimed at increasing engagement by this group, as this change would simplify the eligibility criteria and make it easier to promote registration to British citizens no longer resident in the UK.*

Citizens of Commonwealth countries and other EU member states

42. In our interim report we considered both levels of engagement of Commonwealth and non-British EU citizens at UK elections, and also specific problems faced by non-British EU citizens in participating at the 2014 European Parliament elections, many of whom had been unable to participate because of confusion around the administrative processes entailed in registering to vote at that election.⁸⁷ A number of responses to our consultation highlighted the cumbersome process faced by non-British EU citizens wishing to vote in the UK elections for European Parliament.⁸⁸ The Electoral Commission has acknowledged that it is “unacceptable that administrative barriers prevented eligible and engaged electors from participating in [the European Parliament] elections”, and told us it had committed to identifying “what can be done to simplify the system and remove unnecessary administrative barriers to participation so that this problem does not affect electors at the next European Parliament elections in 2019.”⁸⁹ The Government has also told us that the “Cabinet Office plans further discussions with the Electoral Commission and other electoral stakeholders on the registration process for EU citizens to consider ways to simplify the process for EU citizens living in the UK to register to vote at EP and local elections.”⁹⁰ Both the New European and Dr Susan Collard submitted evidence to us about the data gathered on for which elections non-British EU citizens are registered to vote—to which we referred in our interim report—as adequate data had not been published in the

85 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

86 Written evidence from Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party [PVE 116]

87 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 91-94

88 Written evidence from Rob Goldspink [PVE 24], Dr Susan Collard [PVE 105], New Europeans [PVE 111]

89 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

90 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 7

past and it was therefore not possible to compare certain figures.⁹¹ Both witnesses confirmed that the discrepancies in figures did not undermine the need to both do more to increase registration rates for non-British EU citizens, and to simplify the process for such citizens in registering to vote for European Parliament elections.

43. In terms of better enabling engagement by Commonwealth and non-British EU citizens, we recommended that the Electoral Commission should run a specific campaign aimed at Commonwealth citizens and citizens of other EU member states resident in the UK.⁹² New Europeans welcomed this recommendation and told us that “A targeted awareness campaign would considerably improve the current situation.”⁹³ The Electoral Commission has said that “specific information relating to the eligibility of non-UK citizens to register and vote in UK elections will be available on aboutmyvote.co.uk by the end of January 2015”, and that EU and qualifying Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK will see and benefit from the awareness raised by its public awareness campaigns aimed at under-registered audiences.⁹⁴

44. EU and Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK are amongst the most under-represented groups on the electoral register. We welcome the statements from the Electoral Commission that information specifically for non-UK citizens will be available online, and that they are one of the groups its public awareness campaigns will target. We recommend that the Electoral Commission take active steps to communicate this information directly to those groups to whom it is relevant.

45. We welcome the progress that is being made on considering how arrangements for non-British EU citizens participating at European Parliament elections can be simplified, and trust this will be resolved well before the 2019 elections.

Conclusion

46. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations from chapter 5 of our interim report concerning combatting unequal levels of voter registration and participation at elections. We hope the additional evidence we have received and the further recommendations we have made on these points, as set out above, can inform progress on these issues.

91 Written evidence from Dr Susan Collard [[PVE 105](#)], New Europeans [[PVE 110](#)]

92 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 94

93 Written evidence from New Europeans [[PVE 110](#)]

94 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

5 Improving electoral registration

47. Our interim report looked at several ways electoral registration in the UK could be improved, and recommended a number of changes to current arrangements, including:

- Making registration automatic;
- Prompting people to register to vote when they access other public services;
- Registering students to vote at schools and colleges; and
- Letting people register to vote closer to the date of an election.⁹⁵

We set out below the responses we received on these proposals, and our revised conclusions and recommendations.

An obligation to register to vote

48. As we noted in our interim report, it is not compulsory in the UK for people to register to vote, although the Electoral Registration Act 2013 does provide for Electoral Registration Officers to “require [a] person to make an application for registration by a specified date”, and to impose a civil penalty on anyone failing to do so.⁹⁶ The Association of Electoral Administrators has told us that, although provisions for compelling people to register to vote do exist, the process for actually enforcing this was “a long and costly one”, and, since the penalty imposed would not be retained by the relevant local authority, it was likely that very few authorities would pursue this route.⁹⁷ The Association stated that a better incentive might be making registering to vote a requirement to gain access to other public services such as refuse collection and libraries, a suggestion supported by a number of others.⁹⁸

49. The majority of survey respondents (over 65% of 16,000 responses) believed that registration should be compulsory,⁹⁹ although several respondents made the point that this should only be the case if the register were used exclusively for electoral purposes, an issue we address later in this report. Comments made by those opposing compulsory registration cited the difficulty of enforcement, and that it would not be appropriate to penalise individuals for “doing nothing”. The Electoral Commission noted its support “for maintaining a responsibility to register to vote”, but said that any further clarification on the electoral law around this point would be welcome.¹⁰⁰ That said, Bite the Ballot told us that they “never, ever hammer home the legal requirements to register”, as they say these

95 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 130–44

96 Section 5, [Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013](#)

97 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [\[PVE 72\]](#)

98 Written evidence from Southern Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators [\[PVE 89\]](#)

99 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [\[PVE 72\]](#), Simon Cramp [\[PVE 87\]](#), Helen Aldred [\[PVE 124\]](#), George Wilkinson [\[PVE 125\]](#), survey results [Annex 4]

100 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [\[PVE 81\]](#)

“are ‘sure-fire’, instant turn-offs to young people; especially those furthest away from politics.” Bite the Ballot instead advocated setting out the benefits of being registered to vote—such as the relation to credit rating.¹⁰¹ The Government told us that it believes that “compelling someone to register to vote is unlikely to make them more engaged and therefore more likely to vote.”¹⁰² The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform told us that the Liberal Democrats had “fought hard in Government” to retain legal obligations to provide information to EROs, and to ensure “a civil penalty is available as a lever of last resort”.¹⁰³ Their response stated that they strongly opposed moves to make registration entirely voluntary.

50. We believe it is an inviolable part of the obligations of UK citizenship that every citizen should, as a bare minimum, register to vote. The majority of respondents to our consultation agreed with our view that registration should be compulsory, and action must therefore be taken. We recommend that the legal requirements to register to vote are clarified, and that this basic civil duty should be enforced. Given the views expressed to us by the Association of Electoral Administrators about the time and costs involved in directing individuals to register to vote, we recommend that this process be rethought with a view to increasing the use of this power, and thereby increasing rates of electoral registration.

Automatic registration

51. We have previously recommended that registration should be automatic—meaning voters would be registered automatically using information already held by the state, rather than requiring people to apply to register—and we restated this in our interim report.¹⁰⁴ The Electoral Commission has since highlighted the possibility for “direct registration”—where public sector data is used to identify potential electors and then to add them to the register without requiring them to complete an application form—noting that the Australian Electoral Commission was pursuing this at present, and stating that it would “welcome the opportunity to explore the feasibility and implications of such an option with the Government.”¹⁰⁵ The idea of automatic registration was also supported by several other responses to our consultation.¹⁰⁶ The Government told us that it believes registering to vote “is a civic duty and that individuals should take responsibility for their own vote”, stating that this was one of the fundamental underpinnings of the new system of IER and that this belief was “incompatible with a system of automatic registration.”¹⁰⁷

52. We reaffirm our view that voters should, ideally, be registered to vote automatically, using data already held by the Government. We are pleased that the Electoral

101 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

102 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 2

103 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

104 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 144

105 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

106 Written evidence from the Intergenerational Foundation [[PVE 76](#)], John Metcalf [[PVE 93](#)]

107 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 12

Commission would welcome the opportunity to explore direct registration with the Government. The Government feels that automatic registration is incompatible with the idea that registering to vote is a civic duty and that people should take responsibility for their own vote. Automatic registration would supplement the efforts of citizens who register themselves, and Electoral Registration Officers who invite them to do so. Having such a system run alongside IER would certainly increase levels of registration, and thereby the number of people who could then take responsibility for their vote—having been registered and enabled to do so. *We recommend that the Government take this offer up, and clearly set out its view on moving to a system of automatic registration early in the next Parliament, so that changes can be implemented as soon as practicable. Such a system could operate alongside Individual Electoral Registration.*

The open register

53. Our interim report recommended that the open register—an edited version of the electoral register which is sold to private companies—be abolished, on the basis that personal details gathered for electoral purposes should not be sold to commercial organisations.¹⁰⁸ The Electoral Commission shared our view that the open register should be abolished as soon as practicable—a position it has made clear repeatedly in the past.¹⁰⁹ The Commission told us that it believes it is “wrong in principle to combine a request for information for the purposes of electoral registration with the issue of direct marketing”, and noted that EROs and elected representatives have received complaints and concerns expressed by electors on this point.¹¹⁰ The Commission has told us that it “would be happy to work with the UK Government and EROs to make the necessary changes to regulations to discontinue the open register.”¹¹¹ The Association of Electoral Administrators has told us that it “welcomes and fully supports this recommendation”,¹¹² as has Brent Council.¹¹³ The only piece of evidence we received arguing that the open register should continue to be published was from the Government, which told us that it considered current arrangements for the open register in 2012, and decided to retain the open register and the option for people to opt out of appearing on it. The Government noted that prior to 2002 the full register had been completely open, and stated that if the current open register were abolished it is likely there would be strong pressure for wider access to the electoral register, which could discourage people from registering to vote.¹¹⁴

54. We have previously recommended that the edited electoral register—now called the “open register”—should be abolished. We reaffirm this call in the light of evidence of clear and significant public dissatisfaction. We welcome the Electoral Commission’s offer to

108 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 139-41

109 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

110 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

111 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

112 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 72](#)]

113 Written evidence from Brent Council [[PVE 49](#)]

114 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 11

work with the UK Government to make the necessary changes to discontinue the open register, and recommend that the Government take immediate action to abolish the open electoral register before new registers are published.

National Voter Registration Day

55. On 5 February 2014 Bite the Ballot, a community interest organisation, launched the first National Voter Registration Day (NVRD), with a view to registering 100,000 young people ahead of the May 2014 elections. The campaign led to around 25,000 young people registering to vote, a result achieved from a budget of £9,000. In our interim report we noted the importance of campaigns such as this to supplementing the efforts of electoral officials, and recommended that the Government, the Electoral Commission, EROs and other public bodies should put in place specific plans for NVRD 2015, with a view to taking maximum advantage of this event so as to increase levels of voter registration ahead of the 2015 general election.¹¹⁵ The Electoral Commission has told us that it will “be supporting National Voter Registration Day through its social media channels and will be asking its partners to conduct similar activity to help raise the profile of the day and to encourage as many people as possible to register.”¹¹⁶ The Government told us that it welcomed “all initiatives including Bite the Ballot’s National Voter Registration Day, British Youth Council’s Make Your Mark and Vinspired’s Swing the Vote, that promote democratic engagement and voter registration.”¹¹⁷ The Government also stated that it was “considering how best to support activities which fall on 5 February and beyond, to encourage all groups in society to register to vote”, and that this would include “using social media channels and using our networks to promote voter registration messages.”

56. We welcome the Electoral Commission’s statement that it will be supporting Bite the Ballot’s National Voter Registration Day on 5 February 2015, and also the fact the Government is considering how best to support activities which fall on National Voter Registration Day and beyond. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations on this subject we made in paragraphs 128 and 129 of our interim report.

Prompting people to register to vote

57. In our interim report, we considered the possibility of prompting people to register to vote when they accessed a variety of public services—such as when they register to pay council tax, or register with a GP—and also noted the possibility of EROs working with private companies to better publicise electoral registration. The Electoral Commission has agreed that “there is potential for EROs to capitalise on the many interactions citizens already have with a wide range of public services to help increase both the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers.”¹¹⁸ The Association of Electoral Administrators also

¹¹⁵ [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 126-9

¹¹⁶ Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

¹¹⁷ Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 8

¹¹⁸ Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

supported this recommendation, and suggested that “all public services (including the former public utilities) should be included in such an arrangement.”¹¹⁹ The Commission has stated that it will “encourage and work with the Government and EROs to develop workable proposals for prompting people to register to vote or update their registration details when they carry out other key transactions with state agencies”, but notes that this would require “a strong cross-government agreement”. Specific suggestions we received for occasions when people could usefully be prompted to register to vote were when they received cards with their National Insurance numbers and also when private tenants had their deposits registered with a tenancy deposit protection scheme.¹²⁰ Bite the Ballot supported our recommendation that the Government make specific proposals about how people could be prompted to register to vote when they access other public services, and told us that “the UK can, and should, move to a system that empowers people to register to vote when they (a) access public services [...] and (b) interact with Government”.¹²¹

58. The Leader of the Opposition told us that the Labour Party believed that Government agencies, including the Passport Office and DVLA, should have a duty placed on them to raise the issue of voter registration when people come into contact with them.¹²² He also told us that the Labour Party in Government would give Councils the power “to create mechanisms to reach private-rented tenants through Landlord Associations and registers.” The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform specifically suggested that we challenge HMRC to include a ‘signpost’ to online voter registration alongside the notifications which are sent to every 15 year old of their National Insurance number, so as to direct young people to register to vote.¹²³ The Government has told us that there was an opportunity to explore how the benefits of IER could be best maximised, and that as part of this the Cabinet Office was “actively exploring options for collaboration between online electoral registration and other public sector digital transactional services.”¹²⁴ The Government also told us that the Cabinet Office was “currently identifying the most appropriate official websites to promote voter registration by signposting the link to the on-line registration channel.”

59. We reaffirm our previous recommendation, made in paragraph 133 of our interim report, concerning prompting people to register to vote when they access other services, and trust that the additional evidence we have received on this subject will inform future discussions in this area.

119 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72]

120 Written evidence from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106], All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration [PVE 114]

121 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [PVE 115]

122 Written evidence from Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition [PVE 123]

123 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106]

124 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 9

Registration at schools, colleges and universities

60. Our interim report noted that, given the low levels of registration of young people, there was a strong case for making greater efforts to register 16 to 18 year olds at schools and colleges. We asked the Secretary of State for Education to promote electoral registration at schools and colleges, and also called on EROs to work more closely with educational institutions.¹²⁵ The Electoral Commission has told us that its guidance to support EROs in planning for and delivering IER contains examples of tactics and activities that can be employed locally by EROs in engaging with target groups including under-18 year olds and students.¹²⁶ The Commission, working with several partner organisations, has also written to academic leaders at institutions across Great Britain to encourage their students to register to vote ahead of the General Election on 7 May 2015.¹²⁷ Activities academic institutions have been asked to undertake include:

- E-mailing all students to let them know they can register at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote;
- Holding registration drives at the beginning of classes and seminars; and
- Displaying posters in college and university buildings.

The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform told us that “Liberal Democrats are working in Government to spread best practice among EROs, so that more approach [16 and 17 year olds] in the place where they can most easily be found: school or college.”¹²⁸

61. In relation to higher education, the Electoral Commission told us about two particular instances where EROs had worked with universities on electoral registration. These were:

- In Sheffield: incorporating electoral registration into the student registration process, and
- In Lancaster: having electoral registration information included on university enrolment software.
- The National Union of Students told us that they supported efforts to integrate university and college enrolment with voter registration and stated that they had worked with organisations including the Electoral Commission to encourage University Vice-Chancellors to support action in making it easier and quicker to register to vote. Other instances given in response to our consultation included having sixth forms and universities register students, or provide information to Electoral

125 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 134-5

126 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

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

128 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

Registration Officers to enable them to register young people.¹²⁹ Bite the Ballot specifically requested the extension to Great Britain of the Northern Ireland “schools initiative”, where further education colleges are obliged to provide the Chief Electoral Officer with information on student registration so students can be invited to register to vote.¹³⁰ The Leader of the Opposition told us that the Labour Party in Government would “legislate to place a responsibility on schools to hold ‘voter registration’ sessions when their pupils reach the appropriate age” and “consider proposals to ensure Universities integrate the process of voter registration into enrolment each year.”¹³¹ The Government agreed with us that there was a strong case for making greater efforts to register 16 to 18 year olds at school and in college, and told us that the Cabinet Office was working with the Department for Education on promoting this in schools.¹³²

62. Given the low registration rates amongst young people, there is a strong case for making greater efforts to register 16 to 18 year olds at school and in college—particularly as registration now takes place on an individual basis and can be done, easily and on-line, from school. We have received several sensible suggestions for how this could be done, including e-mailing students with a link to online registration, holding registration drives at the beginning of classes, and displaying posters in educational buildings. *We recommend that the Secretary of State for Education promote electoral registration to schools and colleges, along the lines set out by the Electoral Commission. EROs also should now be working with schools and colleges to register students, and we recommend that the Electoral Commission explicitly include this action in its performance standards for EROs. The Electoral Commission should also report on the implications of duplicating in Great Britain the “schools initiative” that operates in Northern Ireland. All of these proposals could be integrated with broader citizenship education, and include a discussion about how to register to vote when moving to university or away from home. Successful initiatives developed between EROs and universities—such as those in Sheffield and Lancaster—should be replicated across the country.*

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)

The role of EROs

63. In our interim report we noted that EROs played a vital role in the electoral registration process, being responsible for the maintenance of the electoral registers for their area.¹³³ As part of making arrangements around electoral registration clearer to the public, Bite the

129 Written evidence from Rob Goldspink [PVE 24], Jade Azim [PVE 25], Professor Jonathan Tonge and Dr Andrew Mycock [PVE 90]

130 [Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2010-11](#), HC 1379, 2011

131 Written evidence from Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition [PVE 123]

132 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 9

133 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 99

Ballot has recommended that the Government “should explain the remit and role of EROs” on the Cabinet Office website.¹³⁴

64. We welcome Bite the Ballot’s recommendation that the Government should explain the remit and role of Electoral Registration Officers. Such an explanation would increase the transparency of the role, and help to ensure that members of the public know what to expect from their local ERO. We recommend that the Government publish online an explanation of the role of EROs, their duties and how members of the public can contact their local ERO.

Performance standards for EROs

65. The Electoral Commission produces performance standards for EROs, and we noted in our interim report that these had had a positive impact on the performance of EROs, although there was room for them to be made more stretching by, for example, including best practice from high performers, so as to encourage higher levels of voter registration.¹³⁵ The Electoral Commission told us that it had noted a number of examples of EROs working to enhance voter registration and that it would “continue to work to support the identification and sharing of such examples of good practice.”¹³⁶ Specifically in relation to IER, the Commission stated that it had “already been working to facilitate sharing of knowledge and experiences between EROs facing similar challenges in planning and preparing for the introduction of IER”, and that it planned to build on this throughout the transition to IER. The Electoral Commission plans to review the performance standards for EROs after the transition to IER is complete, but that it “remain[s] cautious about the feasibility and cost of setting and measuring registration levels”.¹³⁷ The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration told us: “The current performance standards, whilst, at first, were welcome, are now in need of both review and urgent reform to cope with the nature of the challenge facing EROs and the self-assessed ‘tick box’ nature of the exercise.”¹³⁸

Recognising notable successes

66. Our interim report suggested that notable successes in electoral registration should be recognised, and we also stated that MPs should be more closely involved in the process of monitoring electoral registration and working with EROs.¹³⁹ The Electoral Commission welcomed our view that Parliamentarians had a vital role to play in working with EROs, and stated that it would “welcome any parliamentary time given to the scrutiny of registration issues.”¹⁴⁰ The Association of Electoral Administrators welcomed our

134 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

135 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 104-5

136 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

137 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

138 Written evidence from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration [[PVE 114](#)]

139 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 105

140 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

recommendation on recognising notable successes, and considered that “it should be required as good practice for each ERO to report annually to his/her local authority on the results of the annual canvass and other salient registration issues.”¹⁴¹ The Government told us that this proposal was currently being discussed by the Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission, stating that the Electoral Commission had launched a project to identify, recognise and share ‘what works’ in relation to elections, and that the Commission intended to “evaluate its success after this initial round, with a view to potentially extending it to cover electoral registration over the 2015 canvass.”¹⁴²

67. Although we welcome the fact the Electoral Commission has launched a project identifying, recognising and sharing ‘what works’ in relation to elections, we believe it is a priority to establish what works in relation to electoral registration, particularly given the current transition to Individual Electoral Registration. We recommend that this work begin as soon as possible, and certainly before the 2015 canvass.

House to house canvassing

68. Our interim report noted that EROs had a legal duty to conduct house-to-house enquiries as part of the canvass. We called on the Government to communicate this duty much more strongly, and recommended that enforcement action be taken against any ERO who repeatedly fails to fulfil the statutory duties in a way which has an adverse effect on the quality of voter registration in their area.¹⁴³ The Electoral Commission will be reporting on the 2014 canvass shortly, and told us that if there were any need to take action in relation to house-to-house canvassing outside of its reporting cycle then it would inform us. We have received no such notification. The Government has told us:

There is no mechanism within the current legal framework for registration for the Government to take enforcement action against EROs that do not fulfil their statutory duties beyond the power to issue a Secretary of State direction under section 52 of the Representation of the People Act 1983.¹⁴⁴

The Government added that “prosecutions in England and Wales are a matter for the Crown Prosecution Service (CPS), which is an independent prosecuting authority and Ministers have no influence over its decision making.”

Freedom of Information

69. Only public authorities listed in the Freedom of Information Act 2000 are subject to requests for information under that Act. Electoral Registration Officers are not included in the list, although local authorities are. In our interim report we found that this appeared to be an oversight, and recommended that the Government take action to designate EROs as

141 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72]

142 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 7

143 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 110

144 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 8

public authorities under the FOI Act 2000.¹⁴⁵ The Electoral Commission subsequently told us that its guidance for EROs makes clear that while EROs are not a public authority under the Freedom of Information Act 2000, they should where possible disclose requested information.¹⁴⁶ Similarly, the Association of Electoral Administrators told us that it “encourages EROs to respond to requests for information as though they were subject to the Act and supports this recommendation.”¹⁴⁷ Our recommendation received support from Brent Council, which stated that this “would allow for greater scrutiny of electoral registration activity”.¹⁴⁸ The Government agreed that there “is a case for bringing EROs and ROs under the FOIA”, but stated: “There is insufficient time remaining in this Parliament to complete the required steps (including formal consultation with EROs and ROs), so this will necessarily be an issue for the next Government.”¹⁴⁹

Conclusion

70. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, made in paragraphs 104 to 115 of our interim report, concerning Electoral Registration Officers. We trust the additional evidence we have received on these points, as set out above, can inform progress being made on the areas we have considered.

Electoral Commission targets

71. Our interim report challenged one of the Electoral Commission’s measures of success in its corporate plan, which was that “completeness of the registers does not deteriorate”. We took the view that the current electoral registers were not sufficiently complete and it would therefore not be a success for them to merely not deteriorate. The Electoral Commission has stated:

Across the electoral community there is a widely shared goal of enabling all eligible people to be able to participate in elections, and so we all aim to see 100% accurate and complete electoral registers. However, recognising that there will always be population movement between registers at any given point in time, it is difficult to envisage that accuracy and completeness of greater than 98% is attainable.¹⁵⁰

The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration told us: “If the EC’s stated goal is that ‘every person eligible to be registered to vote is on the electoral register’ then it should be encouraged to aspire to near-perfect 100% levels (of completeness) as possible.”¹⁵¹ The Government’s response to our interim report stated:

145 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 112-5

146 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

147 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 72](#)]

148 Written evidence from Brent Council [[PVE 49](#)]

149 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 8

150 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

151 Written evidence from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration [[PVE 114](#)]

As the Electoral Commission is an independent body established by Parliament, it is overseen by the Speaker's Committee. Consequently, key performance measures for the Electoral Commission are a matter for that Committee.¹⁵²

72. The Electoral Commission's goal should be that every person eligible to be registered to vote is on the electoral register, and we welcome the Commission's statement that the electoral community has a shared aim to see 100% accurate and complete electoral registers. The Commission's aim to have one million more voters registered ahead of the 2015 general election is encouraging, and is a substantial increase on previous targets for registration campaigns, although this is only one step in resolving the fact that 7.5 million people are not correctly registered to vote, and that there are also millions of British citizens living overseas that are not registered to vote.

73. We remain disappointed that one of the Electoral Commission's key measures of success for the next five years is that "completeness of the registers does not deteriorate". As we stated in our interim report, since the level of completeness for the electoral registers is not currently satisfactory, we do not consider it to be a success simply for them to deteriorate no further. *We recommend that the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission review the Electoral Commission's success measures in respect of voter registration and set much more challenging measures for the completeness of the electoral register.*

74. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, made in paragraphs 122 and 123 of our interim report, concerning maximising registration and registration campaigns.

6 Improving voter turnout

75. Our interim report considered several radical changes to electoral arrangements, with a view to increasing participation at elections.¹⁵³ These changes were:

- Letting people register to vote up to and on Election Day;
- Holding elections at the weekend, or designating Election Day a public holiday;
- Online voting;
- Having the option of conducting all postal elections;
- Compulsory voting;
- Having the option of “none of the above” on the ballot paper; and
- Extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds.

Because these would be substantial changes to the way elections are run in the UK, we asked the public to express a view on them so we could decide which proposals had the most support. We have received thousands of responses in the form of written evidence, correspondence, survey responses and views on social media. The responses we received have taken views both on the proposals we consulted on, and also on some new areas.

76. The proposals that received strongest support from our consultation were giving voters the option of voting for “none of the above” and letting electors cast their vote online, both of which were supported by over 50% of the 16,000 people who responded to surveys on these questions.¹⁵⁴

Registering closer to or on Election Day

77. For the general election on 7 May 2015, anyone wishing to cast a vote must register by 20 April 2015—14 working days before the date of the election. Our interim report found that allowing people to register to vote closer to, or on, Election Day would have a positive impact on both registration rates and levels of turnout. For that reason, we recommended that the Government bring forward proposals for reducing the number of days between the cut-off date for registration and the election day, with a view to implementing changes as soon as possible. We also recommended that the Government set out the steps towards enabling people to register to vote and then cast their vote on Election Day.¹⁵⁵

153 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 142-86

154 Survey results [Annex 4]

155 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 138

78. This proposal received a mixed response from those responding to our consultation, with just over 40% of responses in favour, and the same proportion opposed.¹⁵⁶ In addition, when asked as part of the Hansard Society’s Audit of Political Engagement which changes they would support to encourage more people to participate at future elections, 24% supported a right to register to vote up to and on Election Day. The British Youth Council stated that this proposal could be particularly helpful to young people who might not prioritise registering to vote until close to the election day.¹⁵⁷ However, a number of respondents highlighted the resource implications of this proposal and argued that there would be an increased risk of fraud if voters were allowed to register and vote on the same day.¹⁵⁸ Several respondents who did not support letting voters register on the day of an election did state that it might be possible to let voters register closer to the day of the election than is currently the case.¹⁵⁹

79. The Leader of the Opposition told us that the Labour party was “committed to piloting election day registration, so that those who get to polling day and aren’t eligible to vote have the opportunity to do so”, and noted that this change had raised turnout in US states where it had been trialled.¹⁶⁰ The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform also agreed with us that provision should be made for later registration, and same day registration, as it believed that “a large number of eligible voters are engaged by elections in the closing day of the campaign”.¹⁶¹ The Government has told us that it has “no plans to introduce such a change as there is no evidence that large numbers of people are turned away from polling stations because they are not registered.”¹⁶² The Government stated that the current period between the deadline for registration and Election Day “provides a crucial safeguard to preserve the integrity of our democracy”, and also stated that enabling Election Day registration would “present considerable technical challenges and carry significant cost”.

156 In favour: Written evidence from Anthony Boggiano [PVE 01], Matthew Jeans [PVE 12], I Can Have a Say [PVE 38], Kenny Imafidon [PVE 79], British Youth Council [PVE 91], John Metcalf [PVE 93], Demos [PVE 101], Oliver Maddison [PVE 104], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106], Sam Jenkins [PVE 118]. Opposed: Helen Aldred [PVE 124]. All: Survey results [Annex 4]

157 Written evidence from the British Youth Council [PVE 91]

158 Written evidence from John Hemming [PVE 10], Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72]

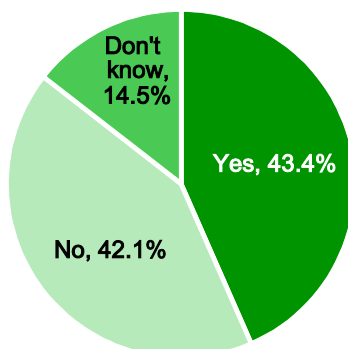
159 Written evidence from Colin Neal [PVE 22], Brent Council [PVE 49], Norman Day [PVE 71], PCRC survey results

160 Written evidence from Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition [PVE 123]

161 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106]

162 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 10

Should voters be able to register to vote right up to and on Election Day?



Source: Survey results, based on 16,061 responses¹⁶³

80. The Electoral Commission agreed with us that “a citizen-focused electoral registration process should enable people to make a new application to be registered to vote or update their details on the register as close to polling day as possible”, but stated that such proposals “must not [...] risk compromising the accuracy of electoral registers or the security of the registration process.”¹⁶⁴ The Commission has told us that it will “continue to work with the UK Government and EROs to further explore the feasibility and implications of such proposals”. Similarly, the Association of Electoral Administrators believed that there were “significant disadvantages” to allowing voters to register right up to and on Election Day, but stated that now “on-line registration is [...] available under IER would make it easier for the person wishing to register at a later stage in the timetable without having to go so far as allowing Election Day registration.”¹⁶⁵

81. We have previously received persuasive evidence to indicate that enabling people to register to vote closer to the date of an election, or on an Election Day itself, would lead to increased registration rates and turnout at elections, and our consultation has shown there is some public support for the proposal, although the response to our consultation was mixed. We reaffirm our recommendation that the Government set out proposals for reducing the number of days between the cut-off date for registration and the Election Day, with a view to implementing them as soon as possible. We also recommend that the Government set out the steps to achieving by 2020 the objective of allowing eligible electors to register and then vote at the Town Hall or equivalent up to and on the day of an election. We acknowledge the need to consider how to accurately verify registrations made on the day, and to provide any additional resources required by local authorities to implement such a system. Assuming these practical challenges can be overcome, there is no good reason for retaining administrative procedures that create barriers to participating at elections.

163 Survey results [Annex 4]

164 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

165 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72]

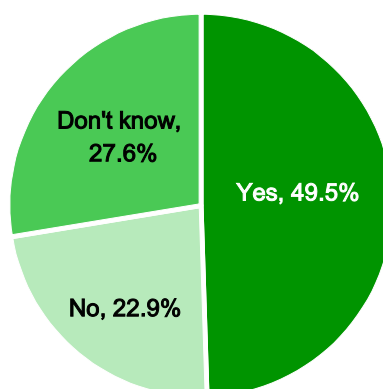
Elections at the weekend or on a public holiday

82. Our interim report considered the possible impact of holding elections at the weekend or making Election Day a public holiday—noting evidence that elections held at the weekend often had higher turnout than those held on a weekday—and recommended that the Government explore proposals for weekend voting, extending voting and designating Election Days as public holidays. There was significantly more support for holding elections at the weekend than there was for making Election Day a public holiday—just under 50% of respondents told us that elections should be held at the weekend (with just over 20% opposed, and just over 25% undecided), while just under 30% supported Election Day being a public holiday, or having voting take place over more than one day.¹⁶⁶ Those in favour of weekend voting commented that this would increase turnout as it would be a more convenient time for people to vote and also prevent disruption to schools. The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform told us that they had long supported weekend voting, as they believe “holding polling day on a Thursday disproportionately benefits the wealthy and the retired”, and holding elections on a weekend would give parties “a greater chance to run effective ‘Get Out The Vote’ operations and electors of all demographics a longer window in which to participate.”¹⁶⁷ Some of those opposed to the change stated that voting at the weekend was likely to be just as inconvenient as voting on a weekday, and whatever day elections were held on was likely to be difficult for some people. A number of people also commented that there would be a need to consider how holding elections at the weekend might affect members of different religions. With respect to making Election Day a public holiday, those in favour stated that it would add to the occasion and mean there were fewer reasons not to vote, while those opposed cited the costs involved, both to the economy and of running elections on a public holiday, believed that it was unnecessary and observed that it would reward people with a day off even if they did not vote.

166 In favour of elections at the weekend: Written evidence from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106]. In favour of Election Day being a public holiday: Written evidence from Susie Gilbert [PVE 17]. Jade Azim [PVE 25]. Against Election Day being a public holiday: Written evidence from Rob Goldspink [PVE 24]. All: Survey results [Annex 4], [PCRC survey results](#)

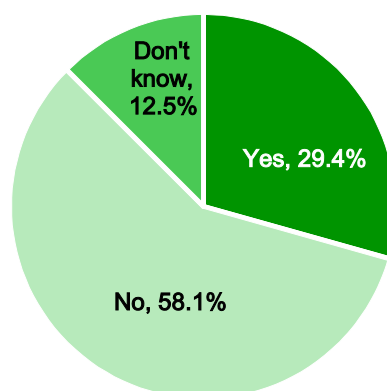
167 Written evidence from the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106]

Should elections be held at the weekend?



Source: Survey results, based on 13,458 responses¹⁶⁸

Should Election Day be a public holiday?



Source: Survey results, based on 13,480 responses¹⁶⁹

83. The Electoral Commission has told us that it does not oppose weekend voting on principle, but that there is little evidence that voting on a Thursday is one of the reasons why people do not vote and change should only be made if there is clear evidence that it would be of significant benefit to the voter.¹⁷⁰ The Commission also noted there would be issues around resources, availability of venues, security, and the timing of elections if elections were held at a weekend. The Association of Electoral Administrators raised similar concerns, and also stated that similar issues would apply if Election Day were made a public holiday.¹⁷¹ As an alternative, the Commission has suggested that advance voting at the office of the Returning Officer and at any other appropriate venue between one and seven days before the close of the poll could improve convenience and access to the voting process. The Government's response to our interim report stated that the current opening hours for polling stations provided most electors with the opportunity to vote, and that

¹⁶⁸ Survey results [Annex 4]

¹⁶⁹ Survey results [Annex 4]

¹⁷⁰ Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

¹⁷¹ Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 72](#)]

postal voting was available to those who could not get to a polling station.¹⁷² The Government further stated that there was “no robust evidence that moving election day to the weekend would have a significant impact on levels of participation”, that faith groups would have concerns about moving elections to the weekend, and it might also increase costs. In terms of designating Election Day a public holiday, the Government told us that there was no strong evidence this would have any significant impact on participation rates and that such a change might also have “consequences beyond the election itself, for example, for business and the national economy.”

84. Our public consultation has demonstrated significant public demand for holding elections on the weekend, and there is evidence that shows this could have a positive impact on levels of turnout. We recommend that the Government explore proposals for weekend voting—with possible alternatives being extended voting and the designation of Election Days as public holidays. We acknowledge the resource implications of these proposals, particularly for rural communities.

Online voting

85. Our interim report noted that online voting was the proposal that had received strongest support from those giving evidence to us, and recommended that the Government assess the feasibility of online voting and hold pilots in the next Parliament with a view to all voters having the choice of casting their vote online at the 2020 general election.¹⁷³ Almost 60% of the 16,000 people who responded to our consultation supported measures to let electors cast their vote online, with many respondents noting that it could have a positive impact on turnout by making voting more convenient.¹⁷⁴ Online voting was also the most popular proposal with members of the public asked, as part of the Hansard Society’s annual Audit of Political Engagement, which changes they would support—with 45% of respondents saying they would support online voting. A number of responses noted that the change would be particularly beneficial to British citizens living overseas,¹⁷⁵ and could also be effective at increasing participation by young people and people with disabilities.¹⁷⁶ Our recommendation on online voting also received support from the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy which told us that they were “confident there is a substantial appetite for online voting in the UK, particularly among young people” and that they believed concerns about the security of online voting could be overcome.¹⁷⁷

172 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 12

173 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 156

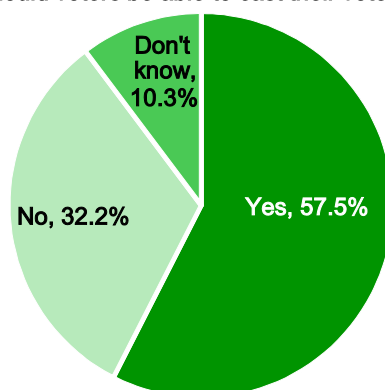
174 Written evidence from Anthony Boggiano [[PVE 01](#)], David Bowes [[PVE 05](#)], Isaac Ingram [[PVE 07](#)], Colin Neal [[PVE 22](#)], Rob Goldspink [[PVE 24](#)], I Can Have a Say [[PVE 38](#)], Kenny Imafidon [[PVE 79](#)], Southern Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 89](#)], British Youth Council [[PVE 91](#)], John Metcalf [[PVE 93](#)], Chris Mullin [[PVE 97](#)], Demos [[PVE 101](#)], Sam Jenkins [[PVE 118](#)], survey results [Annex 4], [PCRC survey results](#)

175 Written evidence from Roger Manley [[PVE 41](#)], Mrs P M Handslip [[PVE 46](#)]

176 Written evidence from Demos [[PVE 101](#)], National Union of Students [[PVE 117](#)]

177 Written evidence from the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy [[PVE 122](#)]

Should voters be able to cast their vote online?



Source: Survey results, based on 16,095 responses¹⁷⁸

86. That said, a large number of people did not think online voting should be made possible.¹⁷⁹ Many of those who responded to our consultation, both in favour or against, stated that security would need to be considered very carefully,¹⁸⁰ with a significant number of those opposed stating that the risk of fraud made the proposal undesirable. Concerns were also raised around secrecy of the ballot and the possibility of coercion. The Electoral Commission also highlighted to us the “significant practical and technological barriers to the development of online voting in the UK”, and stated that the overall impact on turnout might not be significant.¹⁸¹

87. The Government’s response to our interim report noted that various forms of e-voting were trialled in England between 2000 and 2007, and that this resulted in very small changes to overall turnout.¹⁸² The Government further stated that there were concerns that e-voting was not seen by many to be sufficiently rigorous and could potentially be vulnerable to attack or fraud, and that the cost of introducing such a system would be substantial. Its response went on to say: “Public support for such measures is still far from universal and traditional means of voting (such as polling stations and postal voting) remain popular with the electorate.” The Government also stated that “E-voting may be something to consider in the future, but is not currently a priority for the Government.”

88. Online voting received significant support from those who responded to our consultation, with almost 60% of the more than 16,000 survey responses we received favouring the proposal. That said, many highlighted the need for an online voting system to be completely secure. The acceptance of postal voting and the move to online voter registration makes online voting the next logical step in making the election

¹⁷⁸ Survey results [Annex 4]

¹⁷⁹ Written evidence from John Cartwright [PVE 16], Jackie Terry [PVE 70], Susan Hedley [PVE 83], David Green [PVE 99], Dr Martin J. P. Davies [PVE 119], Helen Aldred [PVE 124], Survey results [Annex 4]

¹⁸⁰ Written evidence from John Hemming [PVE 10], Matthew Jeans [PVE 12], Stefan Bialoguski [PVE 62], Norman Day [PVE 71], Kenny Imafidon [PVE 79], British Youth Council [PVE 91], Chris Mullin [PVE 97], Demos [PVE 101], Oliver Maddison [PVE 104], Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72], PCRC survey results

¹⁸¹ Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

¹⁸² Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 13

process more accessible from start to finish. In developing a system of online voting, serious consideration needs to be given to concerns about electoral fraud and secrecy of the ballot. *We believe that online voting could lead to a substantial increase in the level of participation at UK elections, particularly for groups such as young people and British citizens living overseas, who are currently under-represented in electoral participation. We recommend that the Government come forward with an assessment of the challenges and the likely impact on turnout of online voting by the end of 2015. The Government should then run pilots in the next Parliament with a view to all electors having the choice of voting online at the 2020 general election, assuming the pilots are successful and it has been possible to develop a system for online voting which is secure and has the public's confidence in its integrity.*

Postal voting and all-postal elections

89. Our interim report stated that the extension of the postal vote had been a success and that those choosing to vote by post should be supported to do so.¹⁸³ We raised concerns about the fact that almost half a million postal voters not confirmed automatically would lose their entitlement to a postal vote if they do not register under IER. The Electoral Commission agreed with us that “EROs target those absent voters that have not transferred automatically, as part of the transition to IER, under the new system”, and highlighted the fact that “it is important EROs are required to write to all electors who have lost their absent vote entitlement on publication of the revised registers within one month of that publication, explaining what they need to do if they wish to continue to vote by post or by proxy and providing information on how to register individually.”¹⁸⁴ The Government endorsed our “positive view of the effect of postal voting on voter turnout” and noted our “concern about the loss of entitlement to a postal vote of some people under the transitional arrangements for IER.”¹⁸⁵ Its response to our interim report stated that such voters had been notified and encouraged to register individually so their details can be verified and an absent vote provided.

90. Our interim report also recommended that there be further trials of all-postal voting in elections.¹⁸⁶ There were mixed views about the possibility of letting local authorities decide whether certain elections should be held on an all-postal basis—where voters must vote by postal ballot. The majority of respondents felt that future elections should not be held on an all-postal basis,¹⁸⁷ with a number of responses raising concerns about the risk of fraud associated with postal votes, and others stating that it would not be beneficial to reduce choice.¹⁸⁸ Comments made by those in favour of all-postal elections included that it would mean schools would not have to close and also that turnout could improve.¹⁸⁹ The Electoral

183 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 159

184 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

185 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 14

186 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 161

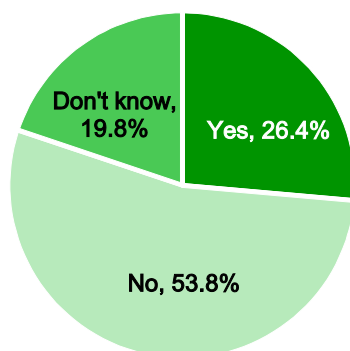
187 Written evidence from Isaac Ingram [[PVE 07](#)], Helen Aldred [[PVE 124](#)], survey results [Annex 4]

188 Written evidence from Ross Lloyd [[PVE 67](#)], [PCRC survey results](#)

189 [PCRC survey results](#)

Commission did not support “any moves towards all-postal voting” as this would “remove choice from voters”.¹⁹⁰ However, the Association of Electoral Administrators told us that local authorities “should be given the opportunity to conduct elections on an all-postal ballot basis as the percentage of postal votes returned at an election has always been higher than the percentage of those voting in person at a polling station” and an election conducted on an all-postal basis “may therefore increase voter turnout”.¹⁹¹ The Government told us that it was not convinced that there is a strong case for further trials of all-postal voting in elections, stating that it was not certain that there was widespread public support for this proposal and also that postal voters are required to provide personal identifiers (date of birth and signature) which go beyond the requirements for registering under IER, making all-postal voting a significant logistical exercise.¹⁹²

Should local authorities be able to conduct elections on an all postal basis?



Source: Survey results, based on 16,043 responses¹⁹³

91. The extension of the postal vote has been a success. Those who choose to vote by post should be facilitated to do so. The Committee recognises the importance of postal voting in increasing democratic participation and calls on political parties, Electoral Registration Officers, the Electoral Commission and the Government to make postal voting more accessible. We note with concern that under the transitional arrangements for IER, almost half a million people who were previously registered to vote by postal ballot and were not confirmed automatically will lose their entitlement to a postal vote if they do not register under the new system.

92. We received mixed views on the possibility of holding further trials of all-postal voting, with the majority of respondents opposing the proposal. That said, we believe that in the future local authorities could pursue such trials in circumstances where they commanded community support.

190 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

191 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 72](#)]

192 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 13

193 Survey results [[Annex 4](#)]

Public awareness and the provision of information

93. Our interim report noted several calls for better provision of information, in a variety of different areas, including:

- Information about candidates at elections, to inform voters;
- Better and more accessible data on election results; and
- Improved public awareness about elections and electoral registration.¹⁹⁴

Respondents to our consultation have confirmed what we heard before, with several respondents highlighting the lack of information about candidates and parties.¹⁹⁵ Some of the suggestions made by respondents to our consultation on improving the provision of information to voters were:

- Voter advice applications;¹⁹⁶
- There should be a short description of each candidate on the ballot paper;¹⁹⁷
- Promotion by Parliament of registration and participation;¹⁹⁸
- Providing information packs to voters with details of parties and candidates.¹⁹⁹

Bite the Ballot told us that they were creating “the UK-first useful voter matching tool (web app.) allowing electors to compare policies, and, in so doing, compare ‘their’ matches with local, regional and national voting intentions”.²⁰⁰

94. With respect to our recommendation that improvements to the provision of information could include having a central source of information for election results,²⁰¹ the Electoral Commission has told us that it does not “centrally hold information on election results as there is no requirement for local authorities to provide them to us” but that it would “be keen to provide any support we can to other organisations that are undertaking work in this area.”²⁰² Public awareness and the provision of information are areas the Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy has considered in detail, looking in particular at how the House of Commons could be more interactive, and better at informing the public about what it does. The Commission has suggested changes such as

194 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), paras 163–4

195 Written evidence from Mary Beton [[PVE 04](#)], John Cartwright [[PVE 16](#)], Adam Bastock [[PVE 18](#)], Southern Branch of the Association of Electoral Administrators [[PVE 89](#)]

196 Written evidence from Matthew Jeans [[PVE 12](#)], Jade Azim [[PVE 25](#)], Demos [[PVE 101](#)]

197 Written evidence from Isaac Ingram [[PVE 07](#)]

198 Written evidence from Jade Azim [[PVE 25](#)]

199 Written evidence from Jade Azim [[PVE 25](#)]

200 Written evidence from Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)]

201 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 166

202 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

creating an online forum for public participation in the debating function of the House of Commons, and better provision of the information and footage produced by Parliament.²⁰³

95. The Government's response to our interim report stated that there were a wide range of sources of information about elections and registering to vote, including gov.uk.²⁰⁴ The response stated that having a central source of information for election results could duplicate information that is already publicly available and that it may only be possible to provide such information over a longer period of time without adding value to the information already produced. It stated that the Government would "need to be certain that there is a robust case and justification for putting in place such arrangements."

96. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, from paragraphs 165 to 167, of our interim report concerning public awareness of and the provision of information. We trust the additional evidence we have received on these points, as set out above, can inform future debate on these issues, and we welcome the fact that Bite the Ballot are producing a voter advice app to help inform voters. We particularly welcome the work of the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy, which has looked in detail at how Parliament can become more accessible and better inform the public about its work. Such changes can only be beneficial to voter engagement.

Votes for 16 and 17 year olds

97. Our interim report considered the case for extending the vote to 16 and 17 year olds, with a view to increasing levels of voter engagement, and recommended that a motion on extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds be brought forward in 2015 to allow the House of Commons a free vote on the principle, with a view to the introduction of legislation if appropriate. It was therefore extremely encouraging when the Prime Minister stated on 7 January 2015 that:

In this House, I am very happy for us to have a vote. Personally, I think the right age is 18, but I am very happy to listen to the debate, to listen to the arguments and to put them forward.²⁰⁵

98. Since we last reported on this issue, the Youth Select Committee, part of the British Youth Council, produced a report in November 2014 on lowering the voting age to 16. The report argued that the franchise should be extended to 16 and 17 year olds, as that Committee believed that "most 16 year olds are mature enough to vote" and they had received no evidence demonstrating they were not.²⁰⁶ The Youth Select Committee's report also called for a "comprehensive programme of youth engagement to be designed and executed" to maximise the benefit of extending the franchise, and also recommended additional support for citizenship education in schools. The National Union of Students

203 [Open Up!](#), Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy, January 2014

204 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee's Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 14

205 HC Deb, 7 January 2015, [col 266](#)

206 [Lowering the voting age to 16](#), Youth Select Committee 2014, British Youth Council, November 2014

told us that they “believe that extending voting to 16 and 17 year olds would significantly help in efforts to engage young people in the election process” and that “young people need to be encouraged to take part in democracy, not kept out from it”.²⁰⁷

99. The debate about extending the franchise can also be informed by the significant experience of the Scottish independence referendum. For the first time in the UK people aged 16 and 17 were able to take part in a major vote. 109,593 16 and 17 year olds registered to vote ahead of the referendum, and 75% of 16-17 year olds claimed to have voted at the referendum, a proportion significantly higher than that for 18-24 year olds (54% of whom said they voted).²⁰⁸ The Electoral Commission’s report on the referendum stated that an important lesson from the referendum for those wishing to extend the franchise was that:

to do this well it is important time is given both for administrators to do targeted activity to register young people and for campaigners to engage with them.

100. We have received extremely mixed responses to the idea of extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, with somewhat more respondents opposing the change than supporting it (just over 40% in favour, and just over 50% opposed).²⁰⁹ A number of respondents even argued that the voting age should be increased.²¹⁰ Many of those who favoured, and also of those who opposed, extending the franchise focused on the many things that 16 and 17 year olds are or are not able to do (such as get married, join the armed forces, drive, buy cigarettes, buy alcohol), and argued on that basis that the franchise should, or should not, be extended. Many of those arguing in favour of extending the franchise stated that the change would improve how young people engaged with politics, and would enable them to have a say on their future at an earlier age. Several respondents highlighted the particular importance of political and citizenship education in schools if the franchise were to be extended, to ensure that newly enfranchised voters were able to make informed decisions. A strong theme in the comments from those opposed to extending the franchise was that people under the age of 18 lacked the knowledge, maturity and life experience necessary to participate at elections. That said, some respondents noted that similar reservations applied to many voters over the age of 18. The Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform told us that the Liberal Democrats had long supported an extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, as this

207 Written evidence from the National Union of Students [[PVE 117](#)]

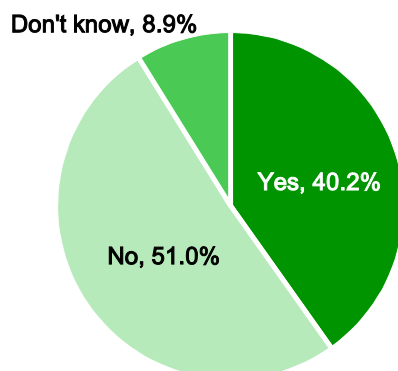
208 [Scottish Independence Referendum](#), Electoral Commission, December 2014

209 Opposed extension of the franchise: Written evidence from John Hemming [[PVE 10](#)], John Cartwright [[PVE 16](#)], Colin Neal [[PVE 22](#)], Martin Warner [[PVE 29](#)], Professor Andrew Russell [[PVE 55](#)], Stefan Bialoguski [[PVE 62](#)], Chris Mullin [[PVE 97](#)], Oliver Maddison [[PVE 104](#)], Helen Aldred [[PVE 124](#)], George Wilkinson [[PVE 125](#)]. Supported extension of the franchise: Written evidence from Anthony Boggiano [[PVE 01](#)], Fraser Borwick [PVE 09], Matthew Jeans [[PVE 12](#)], Susie Gilbert [[PVE 17](#)], Adam Bastock [[PVE 18](#)], Barry E Thomas [[PVE 20](#)], Michael Carrington [[PVE 21](#)], I Can Have a Say [[PVE 38](#)], Thomas G F Gray [[PVE 56](#)], Professor Tom McGuffog [[PVE 61](#)], Peter Davidson [[PVE 66](#)], Jackie Terry [[PVE 70](#)], Norman Day [[PVE 71](#)], the Intergenerational Foundation [[PVE 76](#)], Kenny Imafidon [[PVE 79](#)], British Youth Council [[PVE 91](#)], Demos [[PVE 101](#)], Vince Smeaton [[PVE 102](#)], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]. All: Survey results [Annex 4]

210 Written evidence from Stefan Bialoguski [[PVE 62](#)], [PCRC survey results](#)

would set up “an ideal bridge from citizenship education to electoral registration to participation.”²¹¹

Should 16 and 17 year olds be able to vote in Elections?



Source: Survey results, based on 16,142 responses:²¹²

101. Although the Electoral Commission has recognised that decisions about the franchise are a matter for “the relevant Government and Parliament to decide”, it has told us that it would provide advice about the practical implications of implementing any change to the franchise, and stated that it would be particularly important that legislative changes were made in good time to allow EROs to identify and encourage eligible 16 and 17 year olds to register to vote.²¹³ The All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration highlighted to us that if the franchise were to be extended to 16 and 17 year olds, the “age from which they are permitted to apply to register will also have to fall” and there would therefore be an “even greater need to combine voter registration with citizenship (or civics) education from the beginning of pupils’ secondary school careers should such plans progress.”²¹⁴ The Government’s response to our interim report stated that there was no consensus within the Coalition Government on extending the franchise and the Government therefore had no plans to introduce a change in this Parliament.²¹⁵ It noted that this “is no doubt an issue that will be debated extensively before and after the General Election.”

102. The response to our consultation on whether the franchise should be extended to 16 and 17 year olds has been mixed, with strong views on both sides of the debate. We previously received some significant evidence that extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds could have a positive impact not just on voter engagement for young people, but also on voter engagement overall in the medium to long term. *Committee members hold a variety of views about the desirability of extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, but we recommend that Parliament leads a national discussion on this matter and that a motion on the issue is brought forward in the 2015 Parliament to allow the House*

211 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)]

212 Survey results [Annex 4]

213 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

214 Written evidence from the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Voter Registration [[PVE 114](#)]

215 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 16

of Commons a free vote on the principle, with a view to the introduction of legislation if appropriate. It would be valuable for the Electoral Commission to explore the practical implications of any change to the franchise, so as to inform the decision of Parliament and any subsequent legislative changes made by the Government.

Citizenship education

103. Several responses to our consultation highlighted the importance of political and citizenship education.²¹⁶ Respondents stated that effective education about elections and politics would be especially important in the event of the franchise being extended to 16 and 17 year olds, but was a key element in any package of reforms designed to improve voter engagement. The Intergenerational Foundation told us that initiatives directed at improving the voting system “will be for naught if young people are not given more information to help them understand *why* they should vote.”²¹⁷ The Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy recently recommended that a “fresh, bold, look at the national curriculum” with regard to increased efforts on voter education.²¹⁸ Bite the Ballot suggested that, as part of citizenship education, best practice on engaging students with electoral registration—such as using Bite the Ballot’s own resources—should be properly promoted.

104. We reaffirm the conclusion and recommendation, made in paragraph 172 of our interim report, concerning citizenship education, and trust that the additional evidence we have received on this subject will inform future discussions about this issue.

Compulsory voting

105. Our interim report found that making voting compulsory would ensure that the vast majority of eligible voters participated at elections, and some members of the Committee, though not all, believed that it should be included in a package of measures to meet the threat of disengagement.²¹⁹ The public response on the question of whether voting should be compulsory was relatively evenly split (just over 45% of respondents favoured compulsory voting, and just over 45% of respondents opposed it), with strong views on both side of the debate.²²⁰ Comments made by those in favour of compulsory voting included that this would not just increase participation but be more democratic and prompt people to be more engaged, although several qualified their support by saying that, if voting were compulsory, provision would have to be made for those who were unable to participate, and that it would be important to give people the option to abstain.²²¹ Of those

216 Written evidence from David Bowes [PVE 05], Matthew Jeans [PVE 12], Susie Gilbert [PVE 17], Dr Darren G Lilleker [PVE 37], the Intergenerational Foundation [PVE 76], Sam Jenkins [PVE 118], [PCRC survey results](#)

217 Written evidence from the Intergenerational Foundation [PVE 76]

218 [Open Up!](#), Speaker’s Commission on Digital Democracy, January 2014

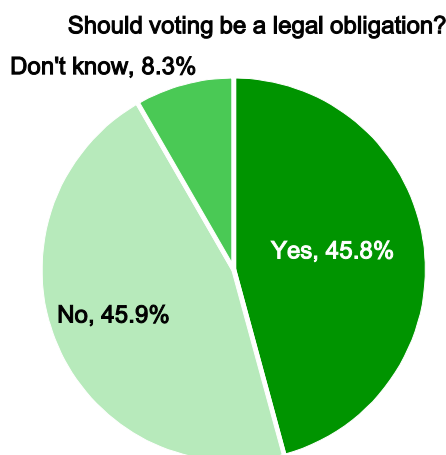
219 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 177

220 Survey results [Annex 4]

221 Written evidence from Anthony Boggiano [PVE 01], David Bowes [PVE 05], Fraser Borwick [PVE 09], Susie Gilbert [PVE 17], Adam Bastock [PVE 18], Michael Carrington [PVE 21], Peter Mason [PVE 35], I Can Have a Say [PVE 38], Andrew Smith [PVE 51], Professor Andrew Russell [PVE 55], Ross Lloyd [PVE 67], Sam Jenkins [PVE 118], Dr Martin J. P. Davies [PVE 119], Helen Aldred [PVE 124], [PCRC survey results](#)

opposed to compulsory voting, many stated that this was an unjustifiable imposition, and that while people could be compelled to vote, this would not improve voter engagement in a meaningful way, since people should be convinced that voting was worthwhile, rather than having participation forced upon them.²²² Several responses also highlighted the practical difficulties and costs that would be involved in enforcing compulsory voting.²²³ A number of submissions suggested that a better option might be to create a financial incentive to vote, rather than penalising those who do not.²²⁴ The Electoral Commission took no view on compulsory voting, but told us that it would “be happy to provide support to the UK Government in considering the practical implications of a compulsory voting”, including “considering what additional options could be included on the ballot paper for different elections”.²²⁵

106. The Government told us that it believed that “voting is a civic responsibility and that the importance of political participation should be reinforced without the need for a sanction for non-compliance.”²²⁶ It therefore has no plans to introduce a system of compulsory voting for elections in the UK. Similarly, the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform also told us that “Liberal Democrats oppose proposals to coerce voters to the polls with threats of penalties or prosecutions”, stating that they believed “it is for the political system to engage voters by providing a genuine choice of differing visions to the electorate.”



Source: Survey results, based on 16,040 responses²²⁷

222 Written evidence from Matthew Jeans [PVE 12], John Cartwright [PVE 16], Barry E Thomas [PVE 20], Avtar Singh [PVE 23], Martin Warner [PVE 29], Rohin Vadera [PVE 36], Thomas G F Gray [PVE 56], A K Hart [PVE 60], Professor Tom McGuffog [PVE 62], Jackie Terry [PVE 70], Norman Day [PVE 71], Kenny Imafidon [PVE 79], Susan Hedley [PVE 83], British Youth Council [PVE 91], Chris Mullin [PVE 97], David Green [PVE 99], Demos [PVE 101], Oliver Maddison [PVE 104], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [PVE 106], [PCRC survey results](#)

223 Written evidence from the Association of Electoral Administrators [PVE 72]

224 John Metcalf [PVE 93], Chris Mullin [PVE 97], correspondence received by the Committee [Annex 2], [PCRC survey results](#)

225 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

226 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 15

227 Survey results [Annex 4]

107. International experience demonstrates conclusively that making voting compulsory ensures that the vast majority of eligible voters participate at elections. Some members of the Committee believe there is a strong case for including compulsory voting in a package of measures to meet the threat of disengagement. However, other members believe that voting should not, as a matter of principle, be made compulsory, and that people should be free not to participate at elections if they so choose. We note the Government's view that voting is a civic responsibility and that the importance of political participation should be reinforced without the need for a sanction for non-compliance. The response to our consultation was mixed, with similar numbers in favour and against. *In light of the mixed views we received with regards to compulsory voting, we recommend that the Government consult early in the next Parliament on the possibility of making voting compulsory for certain types of election, and report to the House by May 2016 to set out its view. This would encourage debate about voting, as a right and civic duty, which we believe could only be beneficial to voter engagement.*

None of the above

108. In our interim report we concluded that if voting were to be made compulsory an option to formally “abstain” or vote for “none of the above” should be included on the ballot paper.²²⁸ Over 70% of respondents to our consultation supported having the option of voting for “none of the above” on the ballot paper, irrespective of whether or not voting were compulsory.²²⁹ Those in favour argued that, although voters could at present spoil their ballot paper or simply not vote, there was not an option to participate at an election and register dissatisfaction with the candidates listed. Of those opposed to the proposal, some stated that it would not be helpful in encouraging people to engage with elections, while others believed that it would result in wasted votes.²³⁰ Respondents on both sides highlighted the need to consider the practical implications for elections if “none of the above” were to win, with a number of different suggestions being made, including re-running the election and potentially disqualifying those candidates that had stood in the initial election.²³¹

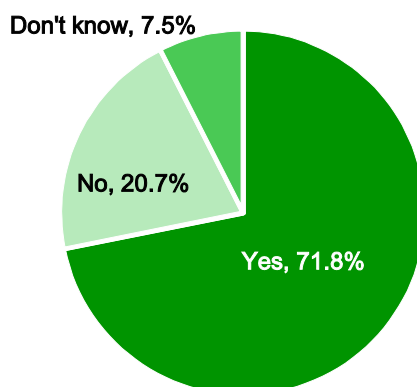
228 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 177

229 Written evidence from Alan Spraggon [[PVE 02](#)], Mary Beton [[PVE 04](#)], Shaun Longhurst [[PVE 08](#)], Matthew Jeans [[PVE 12](#)], NOTA UK [[PVE 31](#)], Rohin Vadera [[PVE 36](#)], John Addy [[PVE 69](#)], Dr Chris Ogden, Demos [[PVE 101](#)], Oliver Maddison [[PVE 104](#)], Helen Aldred [[PVE 124](#)], survey results [Annex 4]

230 Written evidence from Rob Goldspink [[PVE 24](#)], Simon Cramp [[PVE 87](#)]

231 [PCRC survey results](#)

Should “None of the above” be an option on the ballot paper?



Source: Survey results, based on 15,840 responses²³²

109. In a recent report the Electoral Commission stated that it did not believe that there should be an option to vote for “none of the above” on the ballot paper as it considered that “the purpose of an election is to elect one of the nominated candidates to elected office”, and having an option to vote for “none of the above” would “discourage voters from engaging with the candidates on offer”.²³³ Similarly, the Government’s response to our interim report noted that the inclusion of a ‘positive abstention’ box on the ballot paper would allow electors to register their dissatisfaction with a candidate, party or politics more broadly, but that it believed that “when participating in a ballot, the position should be that the elector makes a positive choice of a representative rather than a negative one.”²³⁴ The Government therefore did not agree that the introduction of such a provision would be a positive step, and stated: “the Government believes it should be for candidates and the political parties to actively engage the electorate so they can make a positive choice of representation.”

110. Having the option to vote for “none of the above” on the ballot paper is the proposal which has had the largest support among those who have given their views to the surveys we have drawn upon. This change would enable people to participate at elections even if they did not wish to vote for any of the candidates presented. If large numbers of people did choose to cast their vote in this way it would serve as a wakeup call for candidates and parties that they needed to do more to gain the support of the electorate. We recommend that the Government consult on including, on ballot papers for national elections, an option for voters who wish to participate but not vote for any of the candidates presented, and report to the House on this proposal by May 2016.

²³² Survey results [Annex 4]

²³³ [Standing for election in the United Kingdom](#), Electoral Commission, January 2015

²³⁴ Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 15

Electoral reform

111. Our interim report stated that Westminster had a settled view on the First Past the Post voting system, but noted that the more that centralisation gave way to devolution, the more that electors at the level of the nations, regions or localities would wish to exercise choice over their electoral systems. We concluded that the greater the extent to which democratic institutions outside Whitehall, be they Parliaments, assemblies or institutions in localities, were recognised as the place where the debate about their own electoral systems took place and were decided, the greater the positive impact on engagement and participation.²³⁵

112. A large number of those who responded to our consultation highlighted the adverse impact the First Past the Post voting system had on people's inclination to participate at elections, as well as the view that the results of elections held under FPTP were not representative of the votes cast by the public at a national level. Several submissions expressed dissatisfaction with the lack of consideration given to electoral reform in our interim report,²³⁶ and called for electoral reform—with a number of different systems being advocated.²³⁷ Those arguing for electoral reform included the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform and the Green Party for England and Wales.²³⁸

113. A significant number of those who responded to our consultation have highlighted the adverse impact on voter engagement of the electoral system used for certain elections, and have called for a variety of different electoral arrangements. Some Members of this Committee believe that there is a case for reforming the electoral system used for parliamentary and other elections, but others believe we should retain the current First Past the Post system. We believe that there is a need to respond to the concerns about current electoral arrangements and have a public debate about the way forward. *We recommend that, early in the next Parliament, the Government commission research on alternatives to the First Past the Post voting system for general elections—and experience of these both in the UK and abroad—with a view to consulting the public on whether there is a need to change the electoral system used for certain elections. Parliament may also wish to take this debate forward, either by establishing a*

235 [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 181

236 Written evidence from Canon Michael Hodge [[PVE 33](#)], Thomas G F Gray [[PVE 56](#)], A C James [[PVE 58](#)], Michael Meadowcroft [[PVE 63](#)], Peter Davidson [[PVE 66](#)], Anthony Tuffin [[PVE 73](#)], Dr David Hill [[PVE 77](#)], Make Votes Count in West Sussex [[PVE 92](#)], STV Action [[PVE 94](#)], David Green [[PVE 99](#)], Bishop Colin Buchanan [[PVE 100](#)]

237 Written evidence from Mary Beton [[PVE 04](#)], David Bowes [[PVE 05](#)], Angus Geddes [[PVE 11](#)], Rob Goldspink [[PVE 24](#)], Kevin Cleary [[PVE 26](#)], Written evidence from Dr Christopher Pogson [[PVE 27](#)], John Cross [[PVE 53](#)], Thomas G F Gray [[PVE 56](#)], Dr Vere Smyth [[PVE 57](#)], A C James [[PVE 58](#)], A K Hart [[PVE 60](#)], Michael Meadowcroft [[PVE 63](#)], Nigel Siederer [[PVE 65](#)], Peter Davidson [[PVE 66](#)], Ross Lloyd [[PVE 67](#)], Jackie Terry [[PVE 70](#)], Anthony Tuffin [[PVE 73](#)], Brian Wichmann [[PVE 74](#)], Tim Ivorson [[PVE 80](#)], Jim Halcrow [[PVE 82](#)], Dr James Gilmour [[PVE 84](#)], Keith Underhill [[PVE 85](#)], Mr Christopher Heyes [[PVE 86](#)], Make Votes Count in West Sussex [[PVE 92](#)], STV Action [[PVE 94](#)], Green Party for England and Wales [[PVE 96](#)], Oliver Maddison [[PVE 104](#)], the Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)], [PCRC survey results](#)

238 Written evidence from Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Committee on Constitutional and Political Reform [[PVE 106](#)], Green Party for England and Wales [[PVE 96](#)]

Commission to consider the matter in detail, or possibly by working with a research partner—much as we have with King’s College London on our work into the prospects for codifying the UK constitution. We would welcome any such proposals.

Conclusion

114. We have considered above a wide range of possible reforms to increase the extent to which the public engages with and participates at elections. Our interim report recommended that the Government bring forward a package of reforms to electoral arrangements to increase accessibility and turnout, and establish a series of pilots early in the next Parliament to test the various proposals that we have considered.²³⁹ In response to this, the Electoral Commission told us:

We would welcome the opportunity to work with the UK Government, Electoral Registration Officers and Returning Officers to develop proposals for realistic and robust pilot schemes to test improvements to electoral registration and voting processes.²⁴⁰

The Government’s own response was:

Making elections convenient for voters is an important consideration in helping people engage with the democratic process. It needs to be achieved in a way that safeguards the security and accuracy of the electoral system, and avoids the creation of any new obstacles to voting.

[...]

There has been more than an academic interest in such changes in the in the past and many of the potential processes suggested, such as all-postal voting, voting over a number of days and online voting, have been tested in range of pilots. We will consider the Committee’s proposals further in order to determine which of them could have significant positive effects on accessibility and turnout, and could be piloted in the next Parliament.²⁴¹

115. Given its importance to the UK’s democracy we feel that there is a need to revisit the issue of electoral administration on the sole basis of the convenience of electors. There is clear demand from the public for changes to current electoral arrangements, as demonstrated by the volume of responses we received to our consultation. If taken together, changes to electoral arrangements would demonstrate that “the powers that be” are serious about voter engagement. That is not to say that the solution to improving voter engagement lies solely in making the process more convenient, or providing more information to voters, but we believe there is benefit to making improvements in this area, as well as addressing broader political issues. We

²³⁹ [Voter engagement in the UK](#), para 162

²⁴⁰ Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

²⁴¹ Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 14

recommend that the Government, working with the Electoral Commission and EROs, bring forward a package of reforms to electoral arrangements to increase accessibility and turnout, and establish a series of pilots early in the next Parliament to test the various proposals that we have made with a view to making permanent changes to electoral arrangements by 2020.

7 Conclusion

116. A number of respondents to our consultation argued that the focus of our interim report on proposals aimed at making registering to vote and participating at elections easier would not address the real reasons for low levels of voter engagement, which are political.²⁴² On a similar theme, the Electoral Commission welcomed our focus on the role of politicians and political parties in engaging with under registered groups to convince them of the value of participation, stating that this “is crucial”.²⁴³ We agreed with the importance of addressing the political issues in our interim report, noting that the problem of low voter engagement is to a large extent a manifestation of broader political disengagement and dissatisfaction with politics in the UK, and concluding that substantial cultural and structural changes were necessary to convince the public that registering to vote and participating at other elections is worthwhile. The Government’s own response to our interim report stated:

increasing democratic engagement is not solely the responsibility of Government. Politicians, political parties, electoral administrators, civil society groups, schools, parents and people themselves all have a role to play in promoting understanding and engagement in registering to vote.²⁴⁴

Lessons from the Scottish referendum

117. We noted in our interim report that turnout of 84.6% for the Scottish independence referendum demonstrated there was scope for greater participation at the polls. The level of turnout was the highest recorded at any Scotland-wide poll since the advent of universal suffrage, and 10% of participants said it was their first experience of voting in any statutory poll.²⁴⁵ The Electoral Commission told us:

As we have seen in Scotland with the historic turnout at the referendum on independence, individuals will register and turnout to vote when they are inspired by the debate and are convinced of the importance of the issues at stake. Politicians and political parties must be at the forefront of this engagement.²⁴⁶

Several other responses to our consultation also highlighted the significance the level of turnout for the referendum had in relation to voter engagement more widely.²⁴⁷

242 Written evidence from Barry E Thomas [PVE 20], Robin Kent [PVE 32], Dr Darren G Lilleker [PVE 37], Phillip Barnes [PVE 40], Chris Mullin [PVE 97]

243 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

244 Voter engagement in the UK: Government Response to the Committee’s Fourth Report of Session 2014–15, page 2

245 [Scottish Independence Referendum](#), Electoral Commission, December 2014

246 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [PVE 81]

247 Written evidence from Robin Kent [PVE 32], Thomas G F Gray [PVE 56], Anthony Tuffin [PVE 73], Canon Kenyon Wright CBE [PVE 113]

118. The experience of the Scottish independence referendum, and in particular the extraordinarily high turnout, demonstrates that the public will participate in a poll when the circumstances are right. We note that the high turnout in this case was not due to any technical innovation, but because the vote was one of significance, the public was engaged with the question being asked, and every vote was seen to matter. If we are truly to see the electorate re-engaged by UK elections, action needs to be taken to ensure that the same things can be said about every election held in the United Kingdom.

Other matters arising

119. In addition to comments on the conclusions and recommendations we made in our interim report, responses to our consultation—which are available on our website—covered many other areas. Examples were:

- Views on reforming the House of Lords;²⁴⁸
- Having a comment box on the ballot paper;²⁴⁹
- Enabling the public to engage with politicians online;²⁵⁰
- There should be open primaries for those wishing to stand as candidates;²⁵¹
- Debates should be fact checked by an independent body;²⁵²
- Voters should be able to go to any polling station;²⁵³
- People should not have to pay a deposit to stand in an election;²⁵⁴
- Giving people stickers saying they have voted;²⁵⁵
- That newspapers should be required to state political allegiances;²⁵⁶
- There should be greater transparency about donations to parties;²⁵⁷
- The public should have more input on issues;²⁵⁸

248 Written evidence from Mary Beton [\[PVE 04\]](#), Michael Carrington [\[PVE 21\]](#), Avtar Singh [\[PVE 23\]](#), Dr Christopher Pogson [\[PVE 27\]](#), Professor Tom McGuffog [\[PVE 61\]](#), Robert Copeland [\[PVE 68\]](#)

249 Written evidence from Mary Beton [\[PVE 04\]](#)

250 Written evidence from David Bowes [\[PVE 05\]](#)

251 Written evidence from Chris Grocock [\[PVE 06\]](#), Professor Tom McGuffog [\[PVE 61\]](#)

252 Written evidence from Isaac Ingram [\[PVE 07\]](#)

253 Written evidence from Isaac Ingram [\[PVE 07\]](#)

254 Written evidence from Robert Copeland [\[PVE 68\]](#)

255 Written evidence from Matthew Jeans [\[PVE 12\]](#)

256 Written evidence from Susie Gilbert [\[PVE 17\]](#)

257 Written evidence from Susie Gilbert [\[PVE 17\]](#)

258 Written evidence from Alasdair Scott [\[PVE 19\]](#)

- MPs should be more active locally (such as by producing 6-monthly reports);²⁵⁹
- There should be cyclical or yearly elections;²⁶⁰
- Turnout could be increased by looking at location and number of polling stations;²⁶¹
- Greater devolution or the establishment of local, national or regional assemblies;²⁶²
- That manifestos should be legally binding;²⁶³
- That successful candidates should have to receive more than 50% of the vote;²⁶⁴
- A code of conduct for Prime Minister's Questions.²⁶⁵

These points indicate the wide range of changes that members of the public would like made to elections and to politics more widely.

Need for action

120. **At the conclusion of our interim report, we noted the need for serious changes to both the electoral arrangements in the UK, and its political culture, if the fall in voter engagement was to be halted and reversed. This finding stands, and we have received a significant degree of support from members of the public for many changes to electoral arrangements that could increase levels of engagement. It is now for the Government, political parties and individual politicians to take forward our work and re-engage the electorate.**

121. We reaffirm our call for political parties, individual politicians and the Government to take action to re-engage the electorate. We call again on each political party to include plans in its manifesto for the 2015 general election for improving voter engagement—in terms of voter registration and turnout—as well as details of how they will work to rebuild the trust of the public in politics more broadly. It is encouraging that the responses from a number of political parties embrace the need for reforms in this area, but it is crucial that in the next Parliament the Government rises to the challenge presented by current low levels of engagement. Specific proposals that should be considered for inclusion in party manifestos include:

- *The civic and legal duty of all citizens to register to vote;*

259 Written evidence from Michael Carrington [PVE 21], Michael Yates [PVE 98]

260 Written evidence from Avtar Singh [PVE 23]

261 Written evidence from Dr Mark Pack [PVE 43]

262 Written evidence from David Bowes [PVE 05], Isaac Ingram [PVE 07], Michael Carrington [PVE 21], Avtar Singh [PVE 23], Gerald Davies [PVE 42], Professor Tom McGuffog [PVE 61], Robert Copeland [PVE 68]

263 Written evidence from Michael Yates [PVE 98]

264 Written evidence from Michael Yates [PVE 98]

265 Written evidence from Demos [PVE 101]

- *Registering to vote closer up to or on the day of an election;*
- *Online voting;*
- *Weekend voting, extended voting or designating Election Day a public holiday;*
- *Extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds; and*
- *Compulsory voting.*

122. In our interim report we noted that now the term of a Parliament is fixed it is possible for the Government and Opposition to consider what plans they have in this area and discuss them with the Civil Service before the election so any changes can be ready for implementation immediately after the general election. The Electoral Commission has told us that it has “offered meetings to key parties, and would be happy to speak to any party, about any policies that they may be developing in areas that are relevant to the Electoral Commission’s work, in a similar way to the engagement that they may have with the civil service and relevant government departments in the run up to the general election next year.”²⁶⁶

123. With the date of the next, and future, elections set out in the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, it is possible for the Government and Opposition parties to consider what plans they wish to make in this area and discuss them with the Electoral Commission and Civil Service so they are ready for implementation immediately after the general election. *We recommend that each party take up the Electoral Commission’s offer to discuss policy changes that might be relevant to the Commission’s work, to inform the parties’ manifestos and to speed implementation of any changes to be made after the general election.*

266 Written evidence from the Electoral Commission [[PVE 81](#)]

Conclusions and recommendations

Introduction

1. Democracy in the UK is working less well than it used to and we need to move swiftly to pre-empt a crisis. Millions of people are missing from the UK's electoral registers; at the most recent estimate, 7.5 million people are not correctly registered to vote. Many of those who are registered to vote—and in many elections the majority—choose not to participate at elections, be they for the UK Parliament, local government, or the European Parliament. At the last general election almost 16 million registered voters, 34.9% of the electorate, chose not to participate, more than voted for candidates of any one major party. Include the number of people who are not correctly registered to vote in this figure, and the number of people who did not participate was greater than the number of votes cast for candidates of the two largest parties, or of both of the Coalition parties. That was the election which recorded the highest proportion of registered voters—65.1%—turning out at any UK election to take place in the 21st century—although turnout for the recent Scottish independence referendum was 84.6%. (Paragraph 1)
2. This is not a new problem, but it is one that has gone unaddressed for too long. In a modern democracy, it is unacceptable that millions of people who are eligible to vote are missing from electoral registers. It is desirable in a representative democracy for turnout at elections of all kinds to be higher—and ideally far higher—than has been the case in recent years. It is essential that the scale of the response is equal to the task. Aside from these purely arithmetic measures of voter engagement, there is clearly also a serious problem around disengagement from, and dissatisfaction with, politics more broadly. (Paragraph 2)
3. Many thousands of people have given us their views on voter engagement. These responses are particularly important to our deliberations on this subject, because the views of the public must be central to any discussion around electoral arrangements. It was for this reason we produced an interim report in November 2014, with a view to consulting the public before bringing forward our final report. We are extremely grateful for all of the responses we received, whether by e-mail, letter, social media, formal written submission or survey response. These have been invaluable to informing our deliberations and helping us refine the conclusions and recommendations presented here. (Paragraph 6)
4. As part of our consultation we wrote to the leader of each party represented at the House of Commons asking for their views on our interim report. We received responses from the Conservatives, Labour, the Liberal Democrats and the Green Party. These responses are extremely welcome, and we hope demonstrate a commitment on the part of those parties to take improving voter engagement seriously. (Paragraph 7)

Reasons for low levels of voter engagement

5. It is disappointing that the Government has decided the issue of party funding will not be considered further until after the General Election. This is an issue which has gone unresolved for too long, and further delay is not acceptable. We look to an early resolution to this issue in the next Parliament. (Paragraph 12)
6. A large number of respondents to our consultation felt that the First Past the Post electoral system disenfranchised them, and meant that for them it was not worth voting. It is hard to dispute that in safe seats, where the incumbent has a large majority and the party of the elected representative is unlikely to change at a general election, there is a reduced incentive to participate at elections. This can only have a negative impact on voter engagement. We note that a wide range of electoral systems are already in use for various elections that take place across the UK, and the supremacy of one particular electoral system should therefore not be presumed. (Paragraph 16)
7. With respect to the reasons for current low levels of voter engagement, the conclusions and recommendations in paragraphs 15 to 40 of our interim report stand, although we have expanded above on the concerns that have been expressed about the value of voting. We hope the additional evidence we have received on these points, as set out above, will inform progress on these issues. (Paragraph 19)

Recent developments

8. In a time of austerity it is vital that funding for elections is protected. We welcome the additional £9.8 million the Government has made available to maximise registration during the transition to IER, particularly in light of our recommendation that the Government should look favourably on requests for additional funding. Now this funding has been made available, it is important that it is distributed to those organisations which can most effectively maximise registration ahead of the general election. *We recommend that the Government move with speed to make these new funds for maximising electoral registration available, and report back to Parliament before Dissolution with further details of how those funds which are not being allocated to local authorities are to be distributed. We also recommend that the Government should recognise the possibility that further funding will be necessary to support the implementation of IER and to ensure that electoral registers are maintained and enhanced in the future, and that it should be prepared to allocate further funds if a proven need is demonstrated.* (Paragraph 29)
9. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, made in paragraphs 51 to 59 of our interim report, concerning the transition to IER and the Electoral Commission's proposals for combatting electoral fraud. (Paragraph 31)

Unequal registration and participation

10. We welcome the actions that the Government has undertaken to identify options for making registration and voting easier for people with disabilities, but we note that

these fall short of meeting the recommendation we made that the Government publish clear and stretching proposals setting out how registration and voting will be made more accessible to people with disabilities. (Paragraph 36)

11. *The proposal for removing the current 15-year limit on British citizens living overseas from participating in UK elections should be considered as part of a wider package of measures aimed at increasing engagement by this group, as this change would simplify the eligibility criteria and make it easier to promote registration to British citizens no longer resident in the UK.* (Paragraph 41)
12. EU and Commonwealth citizens resident in the UK are amongst the most under-represented groups on the electoral register. We welcome the statements from the Electoral Commission that information specifically for non-UK citizens will be available online, and that they are one of the groups its public awareness campaigns will target. *We recommend that the Electoral Commission take active steps to communicate this information directly to those groups to whom it is relevant.* (Paragraph 44)
13. We welcome the progress that is being made on considering how arrangements for non-British EU citizens participating at European Parliament elections can be simplified, and trust this will be resolved well before the 2019 elections. (Paragraph 45)
14. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations from chapter 5 of our interim report concerning combatting unequal levels of voter registration and participation at elections. We hope the additional evidence we have received and the further recommendations we have made on these points, as set out above, can inform progress on these issues. (Paragraph 46)

Improving electoral registration

15. We believe it is an inviolable part of the obligations of UK citizenship that every citizen should, as a bare minimum, register to vote. The majority of respondents to our consultation agreed with our view that registration should be compulsory, and action must therefore be taken. *We recommend that the legal requirements to register to vote are clarified, and that this basic civil duty should be enforced. Given the views expressed to us by the Association of Electoral Administrators about the time and costs involved in directing individuals to register to vote, we recommend that this process be rethought with a view to increasing the use of this power, and thereby increasing rates of electoral registration.* (Paragraph 50)
16. We reaffirm our view that voters should, ideally, be registered to vote automatically, using data already held by the Government. We are pleased that the Electoral Commission would welcome the opportunity to explore direct registration with the Government. The Government feels that automatic registration is incompatible with the idea that registering to vote is a civic duty and that people should take responsibility for their own vote. Automatic registration would supplement the

efforts of citizens who register themselves, and Electoral Registration Officers who invite them to do so. Having such a system run alongside IER would certainly increase levels of registration, and thereby the number of people who could then take responsibility for their vote—having been registered and enabled to do so. *We recommend that the Government take this offer up, and clearly set out its view on moving to a system of automatic registration early in the next Parliament, so that changes can be implemented as soon as practicable. Such a system could operate alongside Individual Electoral Registration.* (Paragraph 52)

17. *We have previously recommended that the edited electoral register—now called the “open register”—should be abolished. We reaffirm this call in the light of evidence of clear and significant public dissatisfaction. We welcome the Electoral Commission’s offer to work with the UK Government to make the necessary changes to discontinue the open register, and recommend that the Government take immediate action to abolish the open electoral register before new registers are published.* (Paragraph 54)
18. We welcome the Electoral Commission’s statement that it will be supporting Bite the Ballot’s National Voter Registration Day on 5 February 2015, and also the fact the Government is considering how best to support activities which fall on National Voter Registration Day and beyond. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations on this subject we made in paragraphs 128 and 129 of our interim report. (Paragraph 56)
19. We reaffirm our previous recommendation, made in paragraph 133 of our interim report, concerning prompting people to register to vote when they access other services, and trust that the additional evidence we have received on this subject will inform future discussions in this area. (Paragraph 59)
20. Given the low registration rates amongst young people, there is a strong case for making greater efforts to register 16 to 18 year olds at school and in college—particularly as registration now takes place on an individual basis and can be done, easily and on-line, from school. We have received several sensible suggestions for how this could be done, including e-mailing students with a link to online registration, holding registration drives at the beginning of classes, and displaying posters in educational buildings. *We recommend that the Secretary of State for Education promote electoral registration to schools and colleges, along the lines set out by the Electoral Commission. EROs also should now be working with schools and colleges to register students, and we recommend that the Electoral Commission explicitly include this action in its performance standards for EROs. The Electoral Commission should also report on the implications of duplicating in Great Britain the “schools initiative” that operates in Northern Ireland. All of these proposals could be integrated with broader citizenship education, and include a discussion about how to register to vote when moving to university or away from home. Successful initiatives developed between EROs and universities—such as those in Sheffield and Lancaster—should be replicated across the country.* (Paragraph 62)

21. We welcome Bite the Ballot's recommendation that the Government should explain the remit and role of Electoral Registration Officers. Such an explanation would increase the transparency of the role, and help to ensure that members of the public know what to expect from their local ERO. *We recommend that the Government publish online an explanation of the role of EROs, their duties and how members of the public can contact their local ERO.* (Paragraph 64)
22. Although we welcome the fact the Electoral Commission has launched a project identifying, recognising and sharing 'what works' in relation to elections, we believe it is a priority to establish what works in relation to electoral registration, particularly given the current transition to Individual Electoral Registration. *We recommend that this work begin as soon as possible, and certainly before the 2015 canvass.* (Paragraph 67)
23. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, made in paragraphs 104 to 115 of our interim report, concerning Electoral Registration Officers. We trust the additional evidence we have received on these points, as set out above, can inform progress being made on the areas we have considered. (Paragraph 70)
24. The Electoral Commission's goal should be that every person eligible to be registered to vote is on the electoral register, and we welcome the Commission's statement that the electoral community has a shared aim to see 100% accurate and complete electoral registers. The Commission's aim to have one million more voters registered ahead of the 2015 general election is encouraging, and is a substantial increase on previous targets for registration campaigns, although this is only one step in resolving the fact that 7.5 million people are not correctly registered to vote, and that there are also millions of British citizens living overseas that are not registered to vote. (Paragraph 72)
25. We remain disappointed that one of the Electoral Commission's key measures of success for the next five years is that "completeness of the registers does not deteriorate". As we stated in our interim report, since the level of completeness for the electoral registers is not currently satisfactory, we do not consider it to be a success simply for them to deteriorate no further. *We recommend that the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission review the Electoral Commission's success measures in respect of voter registration and set much more challenging measures for the completeness of the electoral register.* (Paragraph 73)
26. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, made in paragraphs 122 and 123 of our interim report, concerning maximising registration and registration campaigns. (Paragraph 74)

Improving voter turnout

27. We have previously received persuasive evidence to indicate that enabling people to register to vote closer to the date of an election, or on an Election Day itself, would lead to increased registration rates and turnout at elections, and our consultation has

shown there is some public support for the proposal, although the response to our consultation was mixed. *We reaffirm our recommendation that the Government set out proposals for reducing the number of days between the cut-off date for registration and the Election Day, with a view to implementing them as soon as possible. We also recommend that the Government set out the steps to achieving by 2020 the objective of allowing eligible electors to register and then vote at the Town Hall or equivalent up to and on the day of an election. We acknowledge the need to consider how to accurately verify registrations made on the day, and to provide any additional resources required by local authorities to implement such a system. Assuming these practical challenges can be overcome, there is no good reason for retaining administrative procedures that create barriers to participating at elections.* (Paragraph 81)

28. Our public consultation has demonstrated significant public demand for holding elections on the weekend, and there is evidence that shows this could have a positive impact on levels of turnout. *We recommend that the Government explore proposals for weekend voting—with possible alternatives being extended voting and the designation of Election Days as public holidays. We acknowledge the resource implications of these proposals, particularly for rural communities.* (Paragraph 84)
29. Online voting received significant support from those who responded to our consultation, with almost 60% of the more than 16,000 survey responses we received favouring the proposal. That said, many highlighted the need for an online voting system to be completely secure. The acceptance of postal voting and the move to online voter registration makes online voting the next logical step in making the election process more accessible from start to finish. In developing a system of online voting, serious consideration needs to be given to concerns about electoral fraud and secrecy of the ballot. *We believe that online voting could lead to a substantial increase in the level of participation at UK elections, particularly for groups such as young people and British citizens living overseas, who are currently under-represented in electoral participation. We recommend that the Government come forward with an assessment of the challenges and the likely impact on turnout of online voting by the end of 2015. The Government should then run pilots in the next Parliament with a view to all electors having the choice of voting online at the 2020 general election, assuming the pilots are successful and it has been possible to develop a system for online voting which is secure and has the public's confidence in its integrity.* (Paragraph 88)
30. The extension of the postal vote has been a success. Those who choose to vote by post should be facilitated to do so. The Committee recognises the importance of postal voting in increasing democratic participation and calls on political parties, Electoral Registration Officers, the Electoral Commission and the Government to make postal voting more accessible. We note with concern that under the transitional arrangements for IER, almost half a million people who were previously registered to vote by postal ballot and were not confirmed automatically will lose their entitlement to a postal vote if they do not register under the new system. (Paragraph 91)

31. We received mixed views on the possibility of holding further trials of all-postal voting, with the majority of respondents opposing the proposal. That said, we believe that in the future local authorities could pursue such trials in circumstances where they commanded community support. (Paragraph 92)
32. We reaffirm the conclusions and recommendations, from paragraphs 165 to 167, of our interim report concerning public awareness of and the provision of information. We trust the additional evidence we have received on these points, as set out above, can inform future debate on these issues, and we welcome the fact that Bite the Ballot are producing a voter advice app to help inform voters. We particularly welcome the work of the Speaker's Commission on Digital Democracy, which has looked in detail at how Parliament can become more accessible and better inform the public about its work. Such changes can only be beneficial to voter engagement. (Paragraph 96)
33. The response to our consultation on whether the franchise should be extended to 16 and 17 year olds has been mixed, with strong views on both sides of the debate. We previously received some significant evidence that extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds could have a positive impact not just on voter engagement for young people, but also on voter engagement overall in the medium to long term. *Committee members hold a variety of views about the desirability of extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, but we recommend that Parliament leads a national discussion on this matter and that a motion on the issue is brought forward in the 2015 Parliament to allow the House of Commons a free vote on the principle, with a view to the introduction of legislation if appropriate. It would be valuable for the Electoral Commission to explore the practical implications of any change to the franchise, so as to inform the decision of Parliament and any subsequent legislative changes made by the Government.* (Paragraph 102)
34. We reaffirm the conclusion and recommendation, made in paragraph 172 of our interim report, concerning citizenship education, and trust that the additional evidence we have received on this subject will inform future discussions about this issue. (Paragraph 104)
35. International experience demonstrates conclusively that making voting compulsory ensures that the vast majority of eligible voters participate at elections. Some members of the Committee believe there is a strong case for including compulsory voting in a package of measures to meet the threat of disengagement. However, other members believe that voting should not, as a matter of principle, be made compulsory, and that people should be free not to participate at elections if they so choose. We note the Government's view that voting is a civic responsibility and that the importance of political participation should be reinforced without the need for a sanction for non-compliance. The response to our consultation was mixed, with similar numbers in favour and against. *In light of the mixed views we received with regards to compulsory voting, we recommend that the Government consult early in the next Parliament on the possibility of making voting compulsory for certain types of election, and report to the House by May 2016 to set out its view. This would*

encourage debate about voting, as a right and civic duty, which we believe could only be beneficial to voter engagement. (Paragraph 107)

36. Having the option to vote for “none of the above” on the ballot paper is the proposal which has had the largest support among those who have given their views to the surveys we have drawn upon. This change would enable people to participate at elections even if they did not wish to vote for any of the candidates presented. If large numbers of people did choose to cast their vote in this way it would serve as a wakeup call for candidates and parties that they needed to do more to gain the support of the electorate. *We recommend that the Government consult on including, on ballot papers for national elections, an option for voters who wish to participate but not vote for any of the candidates presented, and report to the House on this proposal by May 2016.* (Paragraph 110)

37. A significant number of those who responded to our consultation have highlighted the adverse impact on voter engagement of the electoral system used for certain elections, and have called for a variety of different electoral arrangements. Some Members of this Committee believe that there is a case for reforming the electoral system used for parliamentary and other elections, but others believe we should retain the current First Past the Post system. We believe that there is a need to respond to the concerns about current electoral arrangements and have a public debate about the way forward. *We recommend that, early in the next Parliament, the Government commission research on alternatives to the First Past the Post voting system for general elections—and experience of these both in the UK and abroad—with a view to consulting the public on whether there is a need to change the electoral system used for certain elections. Parliament may also wish to take this debate forward, either by establishing a Commission to consider the matter in detail, or possibly by working with a research partner—much as we have with King’s College London on our work into the prospects for codifying the UK constitution. We would welcome any such proposals.* (Paragraph 113)

38. Given its importance to the UK’s democracy we feel that there is a need to revisit the issue of electoral administration on the sole basis of the convenience of electors. There is clear demand from the public for changes to current electoral arrangements, as demonstrated by the volume of responses we received to our consultation. If taken together, changes to electoral arrangements would demonstrate that “the powers that be” are serious about voter engagement. That is not to say that the solution to improving voter engagement lies solely in making the process more convenient, or providing more information to voters, but we believe there is benefit to making improvements in this area, as well as addressing broader political issues. *We recommend that the Government, working with the Electoral Commission and EROs, bring forward a package of reforms to electoral arrangements to increase accessibility and turnout, and establish a series of pilots early in the next Parliament to test the various proposals that we have made with a view to making permanent changes to electoral arrangements by 2020.* (Paragraph 115)

Conclusion

39. The experience of the Scottish independence referendum, and in particular the extraordinarily high turnout, demonstrates that the public will participate in a poll when the circumstances are right. We note that the high turnout in this case was not due to any technical innovation, but because the vote was one of significance, the public was engaged with the question being asked, and every vote was seen to matter. If we are truly to see the electorate re-engaged by UK elections, action needs to be taken to ensure that the same things can be said about every election held in the United Kingdom. (Paragraph 118)
40. At the conclusion of our interim report, we noted the need for serious changes to both the electoral arrangements in the UK, and its political culture, if the fall in voter engagement was to be halted and reversed. This finding stands, and we have received a significant degree of support from members of the public for many changes to electoral arrangements that could increase levels of engagement. It is now for the Government, political parties and individual politicians to take forward our work and re-engage the electorate. (Paragraph 120)
41. *We reaffirm our call for political parties, individual politicians and the Government to take action to re-engage the electorate. We call again on each political party to include plans in its manifesto for the 2015 general election for improving voter engagement—in terms of voter registration and turnout—as well as details of how they will work to rebuild the trust of the public in politics more broadly. It is encouraging that the responses from a number of political parties embrace the need for reforms in this area, but it is crucial that in the next Parliament the Government rises to the challenge presented by current low levels of engagement. Specific proposals that should be considered for inclusion in party manifestos include:*
- *The civic and legal duty of all citizens to register to vote;*
 - *Registering to vote closer up to or on the day of an election;*
 - *Online voting;*
 - *Weekend voting, extended voting or designating Election Day a public holiday;*
 - *Extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds; and*
 - *Compulsory voting.* (Paragraph 121)
42. With the date of the next, and future, elections set out in the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011, it is possible for the Government and Opposition parties to consider what plans they wish to make in this area and discuss them with the Electoral Commission and Civil Service so they are ready for implementation immediately after the general election. *We recommend that each party take up the Electoral Commission's offer to discuss policy changes that might be relevant to the Commission's work, to inform the*

parties' manifestos and speed implementation of any changes to be made after the general election. (Paragraph 123)

Annex 1: Meeting with youth groups

On 1 December 2014 the Committee hosted an informal roundtable discussion with representatives of several groups that focus on engaging young people. There were representatives from the following groups:

- Bite the Ballot
- British Youth Council
- Catch 22
- Involver
- NUS
- UpRising
- Youth Debates

Points raised during the discussion included:

- That registering to vote needed to be easy at the point of contact;
- There should be better coordination between Electoral Registration Officers and educational institutions;
- Needing to have a National Insurance number to register was a barrier;
- More could be done to register people in school and tying this in with citizenship education;
- With citizenship education, need to link voting with issues to make people want to register to vote and turn out;
- Experience of local democratic experience will have a positive impact on people's engagement with politics;
- Extending the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds could make engaging with young people on politics more effective;
- Online voting and holding elections at the weekend could increase turnout by young people.

Annex 2: Issues raised in correspondence

The Committee received over one hundred items of correspondence following the publication of its interim Report on voter engagement. Points raised in the correspondence included:

Reasons for not registering to vote

- Linking registration to jury service creates a disincentive to register

Reasons for not voting

- People think that Parliament doesn't matter as much as it used to
- None of the parties represent their views
- Vote counts for very little
- There is nothing good to vote for
- Living in a safe seat
- Disillusionment with politics
- First Past the Post voting system disenfranchises huge number of people
- Lack of any meaningful choice
- Complacency
- Dissatisfaction with the political class
- Politicians do not take into account the wishes of the people
- Have referendums on individual issues

Proposals for change

- Compulsory voting
- Requiring some form of qualifications from those standing for public office
- Providing a financial incentive to vote (eg. a voucher, or discount on council tax)
- Extending the franchise to foreign nationals that have been resident in the UK for a certain number of years
- Letting the public vote on individual issues
- Informing people better about rights to register and vote

- Removing the 15-year limit on British citizens living overseas participating in UK elections
- Voting should be compulsory but with the option of abstaining
- Online voting should be enabled
- Give the public a way of influencing policy agendas rather than just voting for a manifesto that is already written
- Give people something to vote for
- Great engagement of MPs with constituents
- Proportional representation
- Include basic politics on the curriculum
- Make registering to vote pre-requisite to accessing public services
- Public funding for political parties
- Make people feel like they matter
- Enforcing requirement to register to vote
- Encourage schools to have student councils and run their own elections
- Take electoral fraud more seriously
- Ban party politics
- Have members of the public serve a term in the House of Commons
- Have option for “none of the above” on ballot papers
- Reform the House of Lords
- Reform funding of political parties
- Greater devolution of power to localities
- Extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds
- Requiring photo ID at polling stations
- Politicians need to be honest and truthful
- Don't allow multiple terms for MPs
- Whipping system should be abolished so MPs vote on personal conscience
- Make Election Day a public holiday

- Automatic registration using publically held data
- Penalties for not voting (e.g.. not being eligible for a passport, disenfranchisement for future elections)
- Elections at the weekend
- Modernise parliamentary procedure
- Reform party structures
- Better communication with first time voters
- Locating polling stations in optimal locations

Opposition to possible changes

- Making voting compulsory would attack the symptoms rather than the cause of low engagement
- No to compulsory voting, believes in the right not to vote
- Postal voting and online voting is open to manipulation
- Not convinced that 16 and 17 year olds are mature enough to vote
- Online voting can't provide for secrecy of the ballot
- Making voting compulsory would be an unreasonable imposition
- Making Election Day a public holiday would be an unfair cost to business

Annex 3: Discussion on social media

Throughout the period we were consulting on our interim Report on voter engagement, we encouraged members of the public to comment on social media using #VoterReform. This included a Twitter chat hosted by Graham Allen MP on Wednesday 17 December, which is available in full on Storify. Some of the statements posted on social media were:

- Have voter campaigns for older people in residential care
- Young people are losing out because they don't vote
- We should move from the First Past the Post electoral system to Proportional Representation
- People should be able to register to vote on Election Day
- Not since 1997 has a British MP been elected with votes of a majority of their electorate
- If you want change in parliament, encourage it by demanding a NOTA option on the ballots
- Hold elections on a weekend or make it a public holiday

Annex 4: Survey results

Below are the consolidated results from the various surveys that members of the public have responded to as part of our consultation on voter engagement. In addition to the Committee's own survey, for which the full data set has been published on our website,²⁶⁷ the data below is taken from surveys that were hosted by Bite the Ballot, Unlock Democracy and 38 Degrees.

The exact questions asked in each survey were not identical, but were sufficiently similar to allow the consolidation of responses, as below. The text of the questions asked in each survey and the response data are set out in the written evidence from each organisation.²⁶⁸

The results for the first seven questions are based on data from all four surveys, and the results for the final three questions are based on the data from the Committee's survey and 38 Degrees' survey, the other two organisations not having asked comparable questions.

Survey results

	Total responses	Yes	No	Don't know
1. Should 16 and 17 year olds be able to vote in elections?	16142	6484 40.2%	8228 51.0%	1430 8.9%
2. Should voters be able to cast their vote online?	16095	9259 57.5%	5182 32.2%	1654 10.3%
3. Should registering to vote be a legal obligation?	16095	10532 65.4%	4301 26.7%	1262 7.8%
4. Should voting be a legal obligation?	16040	7342 45.8%	7361 45.9%	1337 8.3%
5. Should "None of the above" be an option on the ballot paper?	15840	11379 71.8%	3272 20.7%	1189 7.5%
6. Should voters be able to register to vote right up to and on Election Day?	16061	6978 43.4%	6760 42.1%	2323 14.5%
7. Should local authorities be able to conduct elections on an all postal basis?	16043	4235 26.4%	8624 53.8%	3184 19.8%
8. Should elections be held at the weekend?	13458	6662 49.5%	3080 22.9%	3716 27.6%
9. Should Election Day be a public holiday?	13480	3957 29.4%	7836 58.1%	1687 12.5%
10. Should voting take place over an extended period of time instead of on one day?	13483	3935 29.2%	7841 58.2%	1707 12.7%

²⁶⁷ The full dataset is available on the Committee's website here: [PCRC survey results](#)

²⁶⁸ Written evidence from Unlock Democracy [[PVE 111](#)], Bite the Ballot [[PVE 115](#)] and 38 Degrees [[PVE 126](#)]

Annex 5: Hansard Society question on encouraging participation in future elections

As part of the Hansard Society's regular Audit of Political Engagement, members of the public were asked which changes they would support to encourage more people to participate in future elections. The responses to this question are show below.

	Which of the following changes would you support to encourage more people to participate in future elections?
	Please select your top three
	%
Online voting	45
Compulsory voting	26
Making Election Day a public holiday	25
A right to register to vote up to and including Election Day	24
Votes at 16	17
Compulsory voting but with abstention / 'none of the above' option on the ballot paper	14
None	12
An all-postal vote election	11
Don't know	9
Other	2

GfK NOP interviewed a representative quota sample of 1,123 adults aged 18+ in Great Britain, face to face in respondents' homes, between 20th November and 5 December 2014. In order to make comparisons between the white and BME populations and between England, Scotland and Wales more statistically reliable, booster interviews were conducted.

Formal Minutes

Monday 2 February 2015

Members present:

Mr Graham Allen, in the Chair

Mr Christopher Chope
Tracey Crouch
Mark Durkan

Paul Flynn
Duncan Hames
Robert Neill

Draft Report (*Voter engagement in the UK: follow up*), proposed by the Chair, brought up and read.

Ordered, That the draft Report be read a second time, paragraph by paragraph.

Paragraphs 1 to 123 read and agreed to.

Annexes 1 to 5 agreed to.

Summary agreed to.

Resolved, That the Report be the Sixth Report of the Committee to the House.

Ordered, That the Chair make the Report to the House.

Ordered, That embargoed copies of the Report be made available, in accordance with the provisions of Standing Order No. 134.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for publishing with the Report.

Written evidence was ordered to be reported to the House for placing in the Library and Parliamentary Archives.

[Adjourned till Monday 9 February at 5.00 pm]

Published written evidence

The following written evidence was received and can be viewed on the Committee's inquiry web page at www.parliament.uk/voter-reform. INQ numbers are generated by the evidence processing system and so may not be complete.

- 1 Anthony Boggiano ([PVE0001](#))
- 2 Allan Spraggon ([PVE0002](#))
- 3 Sean Wallace ([PVE0003](#))
- 4 Mary Beton ([PVE0004](#))
- 5 David Bowes ([PVE0005](#))
- 6 Chris Grocock ([PVE0006](#))
- 7 Isaac Ingram ([PVE0007](#))
- 8 Shaun Longhurst ([PVE0008](#))
- 9 Fraser Borwick ([PVE0009](#))
- 10 John Hemming ([PVE0010](#))
- 11 Angus Geddes ([PVE0011](#))
- 12 Matthew Jeans ([PVE0012](#))
- 13 Roger Edward Doran ([PVE0014](#))
- 14 John Cartwright ([PVE0016](#))
- 15 Susie Gilbert ([PVE0017](#))
- 16 Adam Bastock ([PVE0018](#))
- 17 Alasdair Scott ([PVE0019](#))
- 18 Barry E Thomas ([PVE0020](#))
- 19 Michael Carrington ([PVE0021](#))
- 20 Colin Neal ([PVE0022](#))
- 21 Avtar Singh ([PVE0023](#))
- 22 Rob Goldspink ([PVE0024](#))
- 23 Jade Azim ([PVE0025](#))
- 24 Kevin Cleary ([PVE0026](#))
- 25 Dr Christopher Pogson ([PVE0027](#))
- 26 Richard Cayzer ([PVE0028](#))
- 27 Mr Martin Warner ([PVE0029](#))
- 28 David Duckitt ([PVE0030](#))
- 29 NOTA UK ([PVE0031](#))
- 30 Robin Kent ([PVE0032](#))
- 31 Canon Michael Hodge ([PVE0033](#))
- 32 Peter Webb ([PVE0034](#), [PVE0059](#))
- 33 Peter Mason ([PVE0035](#))
- 34 Rohin Vadera ([PVE0036](#))
- 35 Dr Darren G Lilleker ([PVE0037](#))
- 36 I Can Have A Say ([PVE0038](#))
- 37 Opendemocracy.Net ([PVE0039](#))
- 38 Phillip Barnes ([PVE0040](#))
- 39 Roger Manley ([PVE0041](#))

- 40 Gerald Davies ([PVE0042](#))
- 41 Mark Pack ([PVE0043](#))
- 42 Jaqueline Freeman ([PVE0044](#))
- 43 Gordon Sheppard ([PVE0045](#))
- 44 Mrs P M Handslip ([PVE0046](#))
- 45 Pensioners Debout! (Stand Up!) ([PVE0047](#))
- 46 Michael Blackmore ([PVE0048](#))
- 47 Brent Council ([PVE0049](#))
- 48 Mark Ryan ([PVE0050](#))
- 49 Andrew Smith ([PVE0051](#))
- 50 John Cross ([PVE0053](#))
- 51 Anthony Douglas Dubbins ([PVE0054](#))
- 52 Professor Andrew Russell ([PVE0055](#))
- 53 Thomas G F Gray ([PVE0056](#))
- 54 Vere Smyth ([PVE0057](#))
- 55 Arthur C James ([PVE0058](#))
- 56 Anthony Hart ([PVE0060](#))
- 57 Professor Tom McGuffog ([PVE0061](#))
- 58 Stefan Bialoguski ([PVE0062](#))
- 59 Michael Meadowcroft ([PVE0063](#))
- 60 Papworth Trust ([PVE0064](#))
- 61 Nigel Siederer ([PVE0065](#))
- 62 Peter Davidson ([PVE0066](#))
- 63 Ross Lloyd ([PVE0067](#))
- 64 Robert Copeland ([PVE0068](#))
- 65 John Addy ([PVE0069](#))
- 66 Jackie Terry ([PVE0070](#))
- 67 Norman Day ([PVE0071](#))
- 68 Association Of Electoral Administrators ([PVE0072](#))
- 69 Anthony Tuffin ([PVE0073](#))
- 70 Brian Wichmann ([PVE0074](#))
- 71 The Intergenerational Foundation ([PVE0076](#))
- 72 Dr David Hill ([PVE0077](#))
- 73 Dr Chris Ogden ([PVE0078](#))
- 74 Kenny Imafidon ([PVE0079](#))
- 75 Tim Ivorson ([PVE0080](#))
- 76 Electoral Commission ([PVE0081](#))
- 77 Jim Halcrow ([PVE0082](#))
- 78 Susan Hedley ([PVE0083](#))
- 79 Dr James Gilmour ([PVE0084](#))
- 80 Keith Underhill ([PVE0085](#))
- 81 Mr Christopher Heyes ([PVE0086](#))
- 82 Simon Cramp ([PVE0087](#))
- 83 Labour International ([PVE0088](#))
- 84 AEA Southern Branch ([PVE0089](#))

- 85 Professor Jonathan Tonge and Dr Andrew Mycock ([PVE0090](#))
- 86 The British Youth Council ([PVE0091](#))
- 87 Make Votes Count In West Sussex ([PVE0092](#))
- 88 John Metcalf ([PVE0093](#))
- 89 STV Action ([PVE0094](#))
- 90 Green Party of England and Wales ([PVE0096](#))
- 91 Chris Mullin ([PVE0097](#))
- 92 Michael Yates ([PVE0098](#))
- 93 David Green ([PVE0099](#))
- 94 Colin Buchanan ([PVE0100](#))
- 95 Demos ([PVE0101](#))
- 96 Vince Smeaton ([PVE0102](#))
- 97 Oliver Maddison ([PVE0104](#))
- 98 Dr Susan Collard ([PVE0105](#))
- 99 Liberal Democrat Parliamentary Policy Committee On Constitutional And Political Reform ([PVE0106](#))
- 100 British Community Committee Of France ([PVE0107](#))
- 101 Dimensions ([PVE0109](#))
- 102 New Europeans ([PVE0110](#))
- 103 Unlock Democracy ([PVE0111](#))
- 104 Canon Kenyon Wright CBE ([PVE0113](#))
- 105 All-Party Parliamentary Group On Voter Registration ([PVE0114](#))
- 106 Bite The Ballot ([PVE0115](#))
- 107 Rt Hon Grant Shapps MP, Chairman of the Conservative Party ([PVE0116](#))
- 108 National Union Of Students ([PVE0117](#))
- 109 Mr Sam Jenkins ([PVE0118](#))
- 110 Dr Martin J P Davies ([PVE0119](#))
- 111 Roger Taylor ([PVE0120](#))
- 112 Digital Debate Consortium ([PVE0121](#))
- 113 Digital Democracy Commission ([PVE0122](#))
- 114 Rt Hon Ed Miliband MP, Leader of the Opposition ([PVE0123](#))
- 115 Helen Aldred ([PVE0124](#))
- 116 George Wilkinson ([PVE0125](#))
- 117 38 Degrees ([PVE0126](#))

Unpublished evidence

The following written evidence has been reported to the House and copies have been placed in the House of Commons Library, where they may be inspected by Members. Other copies are in the Parliamentary Archives (www.parliament.uk/archives), and are available to the public for inspection. Requests for inspection should be addressed to The Parliamentary Archives, Houses of Parliament, London SW1A 0PW (tel. 020 7219 3074; email archives@parliament.uk). Opening hours are from 9.30 am to 5.00 pm on Mondays to Fridays.

Adrian Wait

John East

John B Dick

Maurice Frank

List of Reports from the Committee during the current Parliament

All publications from the Committee are available on the Committee's website at: <http://www.parliament.uk/PCRC-publications>

The reference number of the Government's response to each Report is printed in brackets after the HC printing number.

Session 2010–12

First Report	Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill	HC 422
Second Report	Fixed-term Parliaments Bill	HC 436 (Cm 7951)
Third Report	Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Bill	HC 437 (Cm 7997)
Fourth Report	Lessons from the process of Government formation after the 2010 General Election	HC 528 (HC 866)
Fifth Report	Voting by convicted prisoners: Summary of evidence	HC 776
Sixth Report	Constitutional implications of the Cabinet Manual	HC 734 (Cm 8213)
Seventh Report	Seminar on the House of Lords: Outcomes	HC 961
Eighth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions	HC 923 (HC 1477)
Ninth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions: Government Response to the Committee's Eighth Report of Session 2010-12	HC 1477 (HC 1673)
Tenth Report	Individual Electoral Registration and Electoral Administration	HC 1463 (Cm 8177)
Eleventh Report	Rules of Royal Succession	HC 1615 (HC 586)
Twelfth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions—further Government Response: Government Response to the Committee's Ninth Report of Session 2010-12	HC 1673
Thirteenth Report	Political party finance	HC 1763

Session 2012–13

First Report	Recall of MPs	HC 373 (HC 646)
Second Report	Introducing a statutory register of lobbyists	HC 153 (HC 593)
Third Report	Prospects for codifying the relationship between central and local government	HC 656 (Cm 8623)
Fourth Report	Do we need a constitutional convention for the UK?	HC 371

Session 2013-14

First Report	Ensuring standards in the quality of legislation	HC 85 (HC 611)
Second Report	The impact and effectiveness of ministerial reshuffles	HC 255 (HC 1258)
Third Report	Revisiting Rebuilding the House: the impact of the Wright reforms	HC 82 (HC 910)

Fourth Report	The role and powers of the Prime Minister: the impact of the Fixed-term Parliaments Act 2011 on Government	HC 440 (HC 1079)
Fifth Report	Pre-appointment hearing: The Chair of the House of Lords Appointments Commission	HC 600
Sixth Report	Introducing a statutory register of lobbyists: Government Response to the Committee's Second Report of Session 2012-13	HC 593
Seventh Report	The Government's lobbying Bill	HC 601 (HC 801)
Eighth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions: an update	HC 649
Ninth Report	House of Lords reform: what next?	HC 251 (HC 1079)
Tenth Report	The Government's lobbying Bill: follow up	HC 891 (HC 535)
Eleventh Report	The impact of Queen's and Prince's Consent on the legislative process	HC 784 (HC 224)
Twelfth Report	Parliament's role in conflict decisions: a way forward	HC 892
Thirteenth Report	Fixed-term Parliaments: the final year of a Parliament	HC 976 (HC 874)
Fourteenth Report	Constitutional role of the judiciary if there was a codified constitution	HC 802
Session 2014-15		
First Report	Role and powers of the Prime Minister	HC 351
Second Report	A new Magna Carta?	HC 463
Third Report	Pre-appointment hearing: Registrar of Consultant Lobbyists	HC 223
Fourth Report	Voter engagement in the UK	HC 232 (HC 1037)
Fifth Report	Revisiting the Cabinet Manual	HC 233