

Analysis of the revised electoral registers in Scotland

The implementation of Individual Electoral
Registration: progress report

April 2015

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Executive summary

The transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Scotland began on 19 September 2014 – following the independence referendum – and Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) had until 2 March 2015 to publish the revised registers, the first since the start of the transition.

Taking place immediately after the referendum, the transition in Scotland is happening against a backdrop of unprecedented levels of public engagement and participation. No-one included on the register will be removed as a result of the change to the registration system until the transition to IER is complete, in December 2015 at the earliest.¹ However, EROs will continue to remove any entries from the register where they are no longer satisfied that an elector is entitled to remain registered at an address.

The publication of the revised registers is a key milestone in the progress of the transition to IER but is by no means its conclusion. It is important to remember that the registers do not remain static; work to maximise registration is and will be continuing right up to the registration deadline at midnight on 20 April 2015 to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote in the May 2015 election.

Since 2 March 2015, 127,358 registration applications have been made.² However, while this is clearly positive, it doesn't necessarily reflect an increase of that level in the number of entries on the electoral register: for example, some of these will be duplicate applications from those already included on the electoral register, and others will be from movers who are applying to be added at one address but will consequently be removed from the register at their previous address.

The analysis in this report of the revised registers provides an indication of the progress with the transition to IER since the confirmation live run – the process of matching existing entries on the register against Department for Work and Pensions data and locally held data to identify which entries could be automatically transferred on to the new IER registers – on which we reported in November 2014.

In England and Wales, the transition to IER started in June 2014 and EROs published revised electoral registers on 1 December 2014. We reported on the revised registers and progress with the transition in England and Wales to that point in February 2015. Our report can be found [here](#).

¹ Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the transition to IER is due to end in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who have not either been confirmed or successfully made an individual application to register to vote will be removed from the registers. However, the legislation also allows UK Ministers to make an Order (during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015) which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015.

² Figures reflect the total number of registration applications received in Scotland from 2 March 2015 – 30 March 2015 (inclusive).

Data issues affecting reporting

In order to be able to report on the revised registers, we sought to collect data from the 15 EROs in Scotland – representing all 32 council areas.³

Each ERO has their own electoral management software (EMS) system that they use to manage their electoral register. In Scotland, three EROs, representing seven local councils, have in-house EMS systems that they have designed and manage themselves which they use to administer the electoral registration process. The remainder have arrangements in place with a commercial EMS system supplier. Both the in-house developers and EMS suppliers worked directly with the Cabinet Office to ensure their systems were adapted as necessary for the transition to IER.

Our report on the 1 December registers in England and Wales, published in February 2014, highlighted that we had encountered some issues with the management information functionality of the EMS systems which had an impact on the quality of the data we received. We have encountered similar issues during the collection of data in Scotland, resulting in not all EROs being able to provide the accurate management information data that we expected.

Our report is therefore less precise than we had hoped and, as for England and Wales, we have had to focus on headline measures only. There are also elements of the analysis we carried out for England and Wales that we have not been able to replicate for Scotland. This is largely because the large number of local authorities in England and Wales allowed us to create a reasonable sample even in the absence of data from some areas, whereas the smaller number of local councils in Scotland makes that more challenging. In addition, some EROs have told us that they do not believe the data produced by their system is accurate and so where we have not been able to clarify a figure with an ERO, we have omitted it from our analysis.

This report therefore presents an overall assessment of the state of the revised registers in Scotland but not a detailed analysis of progress with the transition to IER. In particular, at this stage we cannot provide an accurate picture of the composition of the registers illustrating the number of electors who have been confirmed or registered under IER, although we are able to give a robust estimate of the number of existing electors who are not registered individually and who must make an individual registration application if they are to remain on the register after the end of the transition.

These data issues have not only had a significant impact on our ability to report on progress with implementing the transition to date. They have also raised a real risk that the Commission will not have sufficient information to be able to make a robust, evidence-based assessment and recommendation in June 2015 to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to make an

³ Scottish councils may appoint either one of their officers, an officer of an adjoining council, or an officer appointed by a combination of councils to act as the ERO for the council. 10 EROs are appointed by groups of two, three or four councils, representing 27 of the 32 Scottish councils. The remaining five councils have appointed one of their own officers to act solely for their own area.

Order that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015, as reported previously in our analysis of the December registers in England and Wales.

Since the publication of our report on England and Wales in February, the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data we plan to collect relating to the registers in force for the May 2015 elections will be more accurate and reliable. In particular, there have been regular meetings to ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data is intended to cover. This work has focused on improving data collected around the May 2015 registers, and it was not possible to improve the process in time to collect data on the revised registers in Scotland.

We will continue to work with the Cabinet Office, EMS suppliers and in-house system developers in order to improve the data for our next report. Without reliable data about electoral registration in June 2015, it is highly unlikely that the Commission would be able to recommend in any circumstances that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

Our assessment in June 2015 will seek to consider the potential impact of ending the transition to IER in December 2015. The Electoral Commission's goal is that the electoral registers support and enable effective participation in elections and referendums by all those who want to take part. Elections to the Scottish Parliament are due to be held on 5 May 2016, along with a number of other polls across Great Britain.⁴ The revised registers to be published in December 2015 will form the basis of the registers to be used for these polls in May 2016.

Given the significance and potential impact of a decision to end the transition to IER a year earlier than currently provided for in legislation, our June 2015 report will consider not only changes to the overall number of entries on the register in force for the May elections, but also any available evidence about significant local geographic or demographic variations. Our aim will be to make a clear assessment of the effect on the registers of ending the transition in December 2015, and therefore removing entries for those electors not registered individually at that point.

The revised registers

The total number of entries on the revised registers in Scotland at 2 March 2015 was 4,138,345. This figure includes those registered as attainers (i.e. those aged 16 or 17 years of age who will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application).

⁴ The other scheduled polls to take place across Great Britain are: the National Assembly for Wales; the Mayor of London and London Assembly; Police and Crime Commissioners across England (except in London) and Wales; and local government elections in many areas of England.

The register has increased marginally from the register published in March 2014 - by 17,851 register entries, corresponding to 0.4% of the March 2014 register. This compares to a decrease of approximately 2% in England and Wales where the December 2014 registers contained approximately 920,000 fewer entries than the registers published in February/March 2014.⁵ The table below provides a summary of the total number of entries on the registers in Scotland during the period of March 2014 – March 2015.

It is important to note that each entry on the electoral register may not necessarily equate to an actual resident elector in an area, as the register may contain redundant and duplicate entries. For example, when an elector moves to a new address there will often be a lag before their register entry at their previous address is removed.

Date	Total number of register entries	Variation from previous register
March 2014 ⁶	4,120,494	1.4%
September 2014	4,283,938	4%
March 2015	4,138,345	-3.4%

While there has been an overall increase from March 2014 to March 2015, there are 145,593 fewer entries on the revised register than were registered to vote at the referendum, which indicates a decrease of approximately 3.4%.

However, it is important to remember that the number of those registered to vote at the referendum includes **all** those eligible to vote in the referendum, including 16 and 17 year olds, some of whom would not have been eligible to be included on the March 2015 registers because of their age. This means that comparing the total electorate at the referendum with the total electorate in March 2015 risks overstating the level of the decrease.

The total number of those registered to vote at the referendum included a total of 109,593 16 and 17 year olds. If we compare the number of electors aged 18 or over at the referendum (4,174,324) with the equivalent number for March 2015 (4,097,732), we find a decrease in the electorate of -1.8%.

The lack of comprehensive household canvass activity since the end of the 2013 canvass is likely to be a key reason for this fall. Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so

⁵ In England and Wales, EROs published revised electoral registers on 1 December 2014 and we reported on the registers and progress with the transition in England and Wales in February 2015.

⁶ The 2013 canvass was moved to bring it closer to the start of the confirmation process, in order to maximise the accuracy and completeness of the register sent for matching (and therefore to maximise the number of electors who could be confirmed and moved automatically onto the new IER registers). This meant that the registers following what is referred to as the 2013 canvass were published in Scotland in March 2014.

that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – were only required to be sent to properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered.

This means that home-movers have not been captured as effectively as they would have been during a typical annual canvass where all households would receive a form. The processes followed in 2014/15 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in the summer and autumn of 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending household enquiry forms to all properties to check who is resident at an address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register, and carrying out follow up activity as required.

In our report on England and Wales, we used data on the levels of additions to and deletions from the registers to illustrate that the decrease in the electorate there, year-on-year, was a result of the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. Our analysis indicated that home movement was not picked up as effectively and, unusually, that the number of register entries deleted outstripped the number of electors added to the registers.

While the data that is available does not allow us to present the same level of analysis for Scotland, logically, the fact that there has been a decline in the electorate tells us that, as in England and Wales, the levels of deletions has been greater than the number of additions. Also, evidence from the few local council areas for which we do have data on the levels of additions suggest a similar finding for Scotland as for England and Wales – in that the level of additions appears lower than is usually the case following a household canvass.

To fill this gap, EROs have been sending household notification letters (HNLs) to every household in their area which show who is registered to vote at that particular address and will prompt anyone who is not yet registered – including attainees – to do so. Initial anecdotal feedback from EROs on the impact of these letters has been positive. Further information on this activity can be found in Chapter 2 of our report.

In addition to the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity, we also believe that some of the decline between the referendum and March 2015 may be accounted for by the specific circumstances of the referendum, including:

- The referendum acted as a catalyst for people registering to vote and large numbers were added ahead of the poll. This naturally meant that fewer would be added in the months following the poll (because they had already recently renewed or checked their registration details)
- The significant volumes of registration applications processed shortly before polling day impacted on the overall numbers on the registers at the time of the referendum. As set out above, each entry on the electoral register may not necessarily equate to an actual resident elector in an area, as the register may contain redundant and duplicate entries. When an elector registers at a new address there can often be a lag before their register entry at their previous address is removed. This may explain why, following the referendum, there were more deletions than additions.

The size of the registers in force for the referendum therefore represented a high point against which any subsequent registers were more likely to decrease than increase. Unlike in England and Wales, the registers are, overall, larger than they were 12 months before (in March 2014). This is likely to be because the referendum went some way towards mitigating the impact of the lack of a full canvass in Scotland by encouraging registrations. The May 2014 elections did not have an equivalent impact on registrations in England and Wales.

Attainers

The number of registered attainers in March 2015 was 40,613. This is a significant decrease (-37%) on the registers published in March 2014. This is likely to be due in part to the fact that the number of registered attainers in March 2014 was unusually high, most likely as a consequence of the registration of 16 and 17 year olds ahead of the independence referendum - a poll in which they were entitled to vote. Compared back to December 2012, there are 6,095 fewer attainers in March 2015 (-15%).

The fall in the number of attainers does not mean that those who were previously included on the register as attainers have been removed: attainers on the register previously will, in many cases, have reached voting age since they were first included on the revised register and so will now be shown as ordinary electors. However, it does mean that new attainers are not being added at the same rate as in previous years. Again the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014/15 will have been relevant in this regard.

There is clearly a challenge for EROs, the Commission and others to carry out further work to maximise the number of attainers on the electoral registers. Further details of work being undertaken to reach attainers and to increase the registration levels of that group can be found in Chapter 4 of our report.

Postal voters

Across Scotland **the number of registered postal voters in March 2015 is 683,989.** Compared to data collected at the time of the independence referendum, this represents a decrease in registered postal voters of around 113,000.

We do not have reliable data across Scotland on the number of existing electors who lost their postal vote due to not being registered individually⁷ but anecdotally the numbers are small relative to the total decrease. Feedback from EROs indicates that a key reason for the reduction in numbers of postal voters is likely to be that many

⁷ Any existing elector who was not registered individually by the time of publication of the revised register – whether as a consequence of having been confirmed or as a result of having completed a successful application to register individually – will have lost their absent vote entitlement. These electors remain on the register, however, and can still vote in person at their allocated polling station, but they will not be able to vote by post at the 7 May 2015 elections unless they apply to register individually **and** re-apply for a postal vote before 5pm on 21 April 2015.

people specifically opted to have a postal vote at the referendum (due to holidays, for example) then reverted back to being polling station voters.

In order to ensure that those who want to vote by post or proxy are able to do so, EROs were required by law to write to all electors who, on publication of the revised register, lost their absent vote entitlement, within one month of the publication of the revised registers. These communications will have served as a further prompt to those electors to register individually, reminding them that they will need to take further action if they want to vote by post in the May 2015 election or subsequently.

Local variation

While the total number of electoral register entries in Scotland increased by 0.4% against the March 2014 figures, the variation at a local level ranges from -4% to +4%.

Between the referendum and March 2015, all areas recorded a decrease in the total number of register entries, with 16 areas decreasing by -4% or more.

These variations are likely to be due to a combination of demographic factors and electoral registration practices (such as the number of entries carried forward from the 2013 canvass).⁸

Continuing work to maximise registration

The revised registers provided a snapshot of how the registers stood at 2 March 2015 and reflect the significant activity EROs have been – and are continuing – to undertake to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote at the correct address in advance of the May 2015 election.

Since 2 March 2015, 127,358 registration applications have been made.⁹ However, while this is clearly positive, it doesn't necessarily reflect an increase of that level in the number of entries on the electoral register: for example, some of these will be duplicate applications from those already included on the electoral register, and others will be from movers who are applying to be added at one address but will consequently be removed from the register at their previous address.

In the final weeks ahead of the registration deadline for the 7 May election 2015 on 20 April 2015, it is vital that everyone with an interest in democracy does all they can to help to maximise the number of people on the register at the correct address, and we say more about this in Chapter 4 of the report.

⁸ On publication of the March 2014 registers, EROs could carry forward entries for electors whose household had not responded to the 2013 canvass. By law, EROs in Scotland were required to delete entries relating to any such carried-forward electors at the end of the 2014/15 write-out process if they had not received a completed HEF with their name included on it or if the individual had not made a successful individual registration application.

⁹ Figures reflect the total number of registration applications received in Scotland from 2 March 2015 – 30 March 2015 (inclusive).

Action to target young people

Our previous research has identified certain groups which are associated with low levels of electoral registration – including young people and students.

To help meet these challenges, the NUS, the Association of Colleges (AoC), Universities UK, the Academic Registrars Council (ARC), the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA), GuildHE and the Commission have worked together to ask for the support of all Vice Chancellors and College Principals across Scotland, and also in England and Wales, in undertaking a few simple actions to let their students know about the importance of registering to vote, and reminding them that they can now register to vote online. These representatives have been asked to arrange for their institutions to email all their students with details of how to register, to hold registration drives in tutorials or lectures and to work with their local students' unions to share information about registering. These activities will complement the work of local EROs to target students and young people and will continue right up to the registration deadline.

To further support the work currently underway to encourage registration by young people and students, the Commission is working in partnership with Facebook. Following on from the activity that took place on National Voter Registration Day, Facebook users are also now able to add a 'Registered to Vote' Life Event to their Facebook Timeline which can then be shared with their contacts on Facebook to further increase awareness levels in young people. This is particularly important in relation to reaching students as they are one of the key demographics who interact with Facebook on a daily basis.

EROs are also trialling new approaches in their work to target registration activity at young people and this includes exploring opportunities for harnessing modern technologies. For example the EROs for Ayrshire, Dundee and Renfrewshire are currently piloting a new smartphone app targeted at attainers, first time voters and students. The app provides users with regularly updated information on voting as well as a direct link to the online registration portal. The app is being promoted through local schools, colleges, universities and youth groups and the results of the pilot will be evaluated following the May 2015 election.

Partnership work

As part of our voter information campaign for the Scottish Independence Referendum, we have already successfully worked with partners such as Shelter Scotland, Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament, NUS Scotland and Universities Scotland to reach audiences who are less likely to be registered or face additional barriers to voting. This work continued as part of our public awareness activity to support the write-out process in 2014/15, where we developed partnerships with a wide range of corporate, public and voluntary organisations to use their established communication channels to help extend our reach into groups we have identified as being typically under-registered. Partnership working is important to help build on, promote and complement the work that is already going on to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote. We are working with organisations such as the National Union of Students Scotland, Citizens Advice Bureau, the Learner

Driving Centre and Mencap to draw on their experiences and target messages at various groups and encourage voter registration amongst their key target audiences, which include groups who are typically under-registered. Such organisations have far greater reach into under registered groups than any single national body could achieve by itself, while they also help to explain the message in a way that resonates with voters in different contexts.

Further information on our partnership work can be found in Chapter 4 of the report.

Electoral Commission public awareness campaign

On 16 March, the Commission launched a national public awareness campaign which includes television, catch-up TV and online advertising. The objective of the campaign is to encourage people to register to vote ahead of the 20 April deadline. It will reach all adults, but with a focus on groups that our research has identified as being less likely to be registered to vote, such as students and young people, those who have recently moved home, people who rent their home, and people from some black and minority ethnic communities. This involves ensuring that our advert is shown on certain TV stations at specific times to capture our target audiences and that our digital advertising appears on a range of websites that are known to be accessed by members of these target groups. In addition, alongside our TV advert, we have broadcast an advert on Channel 4 using the cast and production style of their hit show Gogglebox. This is the biggest show on Channel 4 and will help us reach young people.

Taken together, the activity being carried out across the electoral community – by EROs, the Commission and many others – will go a long way towards helping to ensure that anyone who is not currently registered at the correct address takes the necessary action before the 20 April deadline so that they are able to participate in the May 2015 election.

After the May 2015 election: what happens next?

Everyone's focus now needs to be on maximising registration ahead of 20 April – which is not only the registration deadline for the May 2015 election but also a key staging point in the transition to IER. However, while this is another important milestone, it is by no means the end of the process.

June 2015 report and decision on ending the transition to IER

In June 2015, we will report again, this time on the state of the registers in force at the May 2015 elections and on progress with the transition to IER to that point. As outlined above, our ability to conduct a comprehensive analysis and to be able to make a robust, evidence-based recommendation to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to make an Order to bring forward the end of the transition to

IER to December 2015, will be dependent on Cabinet Office, EMS suppliers and in-house system developers taking urgent action to ensure we can base our analysis on reliable data.

Under existing legislation, the transition to IER is due to end in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who have not either been confirmed or successfully made an individual application to register to vote will be removed from the registers. However, the legislation also allows UK Ministers to make an Order (during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015) which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015. A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by the UK Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.

In order to ensure our assessment is as up-to-date as possible we intend to collect local authority-level data from all EROs in Great Britain relating to the registers which are in force for the May 2015 elections. As highlighted above, without reliable data about electoral registration in June 2015, it is highly unlikely that the Commission would be able to recommend in any circumstances that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

If the data allows, our assessment will consider the potential impact of ending the transition to IER in December 2015. The Electoral Commission's goal is that electoral registers support and enable effective participation in elections and referendums by all those who want to take part. Elections to the Scottish Parliament are due to be held on 5 May 2016, along with a number of other polls across Great Britain.¹⁰ The revised registers to be published in December 2015 will form the basis for the registers to be used for these polls in May 2016.

We also recognise, however, that electoral registers will continue to be used for other purposes, in particular determining the distribution and boundaries of parliamentary constituencies and other electoral areas. The registers published in December 2015 will be used as the basis for calculating the size of constituencies as part of the next scheduled UK Parliamentary boundary review. Our analysis of the registers in place for the May 2015 elections will therefore be of interest in that context – although this will not be its primary focus – and it is for governments and legislatures to consider how best to use electoral data in any future boundary revision exercise. Following its recent inquiry on the redrawing of UK Parliamentary boundaries the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee recommended that the UK Government consult the Boundary Commissions on the implications for the next review of bringing forward the end date for transitional arrangements. The Select Committee also recommended that the Commission includes information in our advice to UK Ministers and Parliament in our June 2015 report which would enable an assessment of the impact the transition to IER on the next boundary review.

¹⁰ The other scheduled polls to take place across Great Britain are: the National Assembly for Wales; the Mayor of London and London Assembly; Police and Crime Commissioners across England (except in London) and Wales; and local government elections in many areas of England.

Given the significance and potential impact of a decision to end the transition to IER a year earlier than currently provided for in legislation, our June report will consider not only the overall number of entries on the electoral registers, including how many of those are individually registered, but also any evidence about significant local geographic or demographic variations. Our aim will be to make a clear assessment of the effect on the registers of ending the transition in December 2015, and therefore removing entries for those electors not registered individually at that point.

Smith Commission's proposals

Following the referendum, the Smith Commission on further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament was established and presented its proposals, referred to as 'the Smith Commission Agreement', on 27 November 2014.¹¹ This proposed that the Scottish Parliament be given powers over how its members are elected, together with powers to extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, allowing them to vote in the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary elections. The Scottish Parliament would also be given additional powers in relation to the franchise for local government elections in Scotland.

Following the publication of the Smith Commission proposals the UK Government published a Command paper on 22 January. The draft clauses contained in the paper are intended to show how the measures included in the Smith Agreement would look in law. It is expected that the next UK Government will take the clauses forward in a Scotland Bill during the first session of the new UK Parliament.

Prior to the publication of the draft clauses on 22 January, an order was tabled in the UK and Scottish Parliaments on 20 January modifying the Scotland Act 1998: this order has now been passed, and as such transfers powers to the Scottish Parliament to enable it to extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in time for the 2016 Scottish Parliament election and the council elections scheduled for May 2017. The Scottish Government is now expected to introduce a franchise bill into the Scottish Parliament to enable this; the bill is expected to pass all stages in the Scottish Parliament by summer recess in late June 2015.

The Commission has discussed the provisions of the proposed bill with Scottish Government officials and will continue to work with them to ensure that the franchise is extended in a way that ensures 16 and 17 year olds can participate fully. We will also continue to work with EROs to ensure that their registration plans, including their wider public engagement strategy, reflect the additional work that will be involved to target information at those 16 and 17 year olds who will be eligible to vote.

2015 annual canvass

In the summer of 2015, EROs across Great Britain will be carrying out the annual canvass which, unlike in 2014/15, will involve sending HEFs to **all** properties.

¹¹ Report of the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament: <http://www.smith-commission.scot/smith-commission-report/>.

As part of the canvass, any new potential electors identified by each ERO will be sent an invitation to register and a registration application form. If no response is received, EROs must take specified steps – including issuing two reminders and a personal visit - to follow up with any non-responders.

EROs' activity will also include activities designed to try to ensure that as many existing electors who are still not registered individually successfully complete an individual registration application.

Revised registers must be published by 1 December 2015 on conclusion of the canvass.¹²

Beyond the transition to IER

The transition to an individual electoral registration system in Great Britain will mark a significant step in the transformation of electoral registration for the UK. Our research on the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in the UK has shown that there is nevertheless still significant scope for further improvements to the electoral registration process, and the transformation of electoral registration should not stop at the end of the transition.

The Electoral Commission and others with an interest in ensuring accurate and complete electoral registers, including EROs, political parties and elected representatives, will expect and seek further improvements to current processes, considering innovative and challenging proposals such as:

- The potential for using confirmation matching processes to compare information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass against data held by DWP, which could significantly reduce the number of people who need to provide their date of birth and National Insurance number in order for EROs to be able to verify their identity.
- The potential to build 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, prompting people to register to vote or update their registration details at key points when they use other public services, such as applying for or receiving benefits or tax credits, changing their GP, applying for a driving license or renewing their passport.
- The potential for more direct registration, using trusted information supplied by other government and public agencies to directly enrol electors or update their details on the electoral register, to significantly improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers.

¹² EROs are required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there is a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass (1 July – 1 December 2015), in which case the publication of the register can be postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

Both the UK Government and the Scottish Government will need to ensure that they retain the capacity to focus on and work together to manage further change to electoral registration in the medium and long term.

1 Introduction

Background

1.1 In Scotland, as with the rest of Great Britain, the household system of electoral registration has now been replaced by Individual Electoral Registration (IER) whereby each person is responsible for registering to vote individually. In addition, people can now register to vote online.

1.2 The transition to IER in Scotland began in September 2014, following the referendum on independence. Taking place immediately after the referendum, the transition in Scotland is therefore happening against a backdrop of unprecedented levels of public engagement and participation. No-one included on the register will be removed as a result of the change to the registration system until the transition to IER is complete, in December 2015 at the earliest.¹³ However, EROs will continue to remove any entries from the register where they are no longer satisfied that an elector is entitled to remain registered at an address.

1.3 The first phase of the transition to IER involved a data matching exercise to compare existing electors' details with the details held on the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database – a process known as the 'confirmation live run' (CLR).¹⁴

1.4 In November 2014, we published a report on progress with the transition in Scotland up to the end of the CLR. In England and Wales, the CLR process took place over the summer of 2014 and we reported on the results in October.¹⁵

1.5 Following the CLR, the 'write-out' phase of the transition commenced, with EROs sending confirmation letters to those who had been confirmed and so automatically transferred onto the new IER registers; and invitations to register to those existing electors who had not been confirmed.

1.6 Alongside the write-out to existing electors, EROs also sent household enquiry forms (HEF) to addresses where they believed this would enable them to identify any potential eligible electors who were not already registered to vote at that address so that they could invite them to register. This arrangement was unique to the

¹³ Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the transition to IER is due to end in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who have not either been confirmed or successfully made an individual application to register to vote will be removed from the registers. However, the legislation also allows UK Ministers to make an Order (during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015) which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015.

¹⁴ A dry-run of this process – known as the 'confirmation dry run' or 'CDR' – was carried out in summer 2013.

¹⁵ Reports on the Confirmation Live Run in both England & Wales and Scotland can be accessed on the Electoral Commission's website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>

canvass that took place in late 2014/early 2015; in summer 2015 and future years HEFs will be sent to all properties.

1.7 EROs are required by law to follow up where there is no response to an invitation to register or household enquiry form by taking specified steps – including issuing two reminders and a personal visit - to follow up with any non-responders.

The revised registers

1.8 EROs in Scotland were required by law to publish revised registers by 2 March 2015.¹⁶

1.9 The publication of these registers is a key milestone in the progress of the transition to IER but is by no means its conclusion. It is important to remember that the registers do not remain static; work to maximise registration is and will be continuing right up to the registration deadline at midnight on 20 April 2015 to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote in the May 2015 election.

Data collection

1.10 To enable us to report on the state of the revised registers and on progress with the transition to IER to date we sought to collect data from the 15 EROs in Scotland – representing all 32 council areas.¹⁷

1.11 Each ERO has their own electoral management software (EMS) system that they use to manage their electoral register. In Scotland, three EROs, representing seven local councils, have in-house EMS systems that they have designed and manage themselves which they use to administer the electoral registration process. The remainder have arrangements in place with a commercial EMS system supplier. Both the in-house developers and EMS suppliers worked directly with the Cabinet Office to ensure their systems were adapted as necessary for the transition to IER.

1.12 Despite providing the Cabinet Office - at an early stage in the development process - with a clear indication of the data that both we and EROs would need in order to be able to make a full assessment of IER progress, our analysis has been limited because not all EROs were able to provide the accurate management information data that we expected. This reflects the issues reported to us across England and Wales following the collection of data after the publication of their revised registers in December. This report is therefore less precise than we had hoped – we have had to focus on headline measures only.

¹⁶ Whilst EROs in Scotland were required to publish revised registers by 2 March 2015, in practice most EROs published their registers by the end of February. This report therefore refers to the revised registers published by 2 March as the 'revised registers'.

¹⁷ Scottish councils may appoint either one of their officers, an officer of an adjoining council, or an officer appointed by a combination of councils to act as the ERO for the council. 10 EROs are appointed by groups of two, three or four councils, representing 27 of the 32 Scottish councils. The remaining five councils have appointed one of their own officers to act solely for their own area.

1.13 As reported in our analysis of the 1 December 2014 registers in England and Wales, these data issues also create a real risk that we will not have the information we would need to be able to make a robust, evidence-based recommendation in June 2015 to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to recommend to Parliament that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward from December 2016 to December 2015.¹⁸

1.14 Since the publication of our report in February the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data we plan to collect relating to the registers in force for the May 2015 elections will be more accurate and reliable. In particular, there have been regular meetings to ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data is intended to cover. This work has focused on improving data collected around the May 2015 registers, and it was not possible to improve the process in time to collect data on the revised registers in Scotland.

1.15 We will continue to work with the Cabinet Office, EMS suppliers and in-house system developers in order to improve the data for our next report. Without reliable data about electoral registration in June 2015, it is highly unlikely that the Commission would be able to recommend in any circumstances that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

This report

1.16 This report analyses the progress of the transition in Scotland from the end of the confirmation exercise up to the publication of the revised registers, and provides an analysis of the state of the registers at that point in time.

1.17 **Chapter 2** of this report provides details of the IER transition process from September 2014 to March 2015.

1.18 **Chapter 3** contains an analysis of the revised registers published by EROs in Scotland, including an assessment of the total number of entries on the electoral registers and levels of variations in the number of entries on the registers for different council areas.

1.19 **Chapter 4** focuses on the work that is needed to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote ahead of the May 2015 election.

1.20 **Chapter 5** summarises what happens after the registration deadline for the May 2015 election, including the work the Commission intends to do to report on progress in June 2015 to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to

¹⁸ Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the transition to IER is due to end in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who have not either been confirmed or successfully made an individual application to register to vote will be removed from the registers. However, the legislation also allows UK Ministers to make an Order (during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015) which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015.

recommend to the UK Parliament that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward.

2 The transition to IER

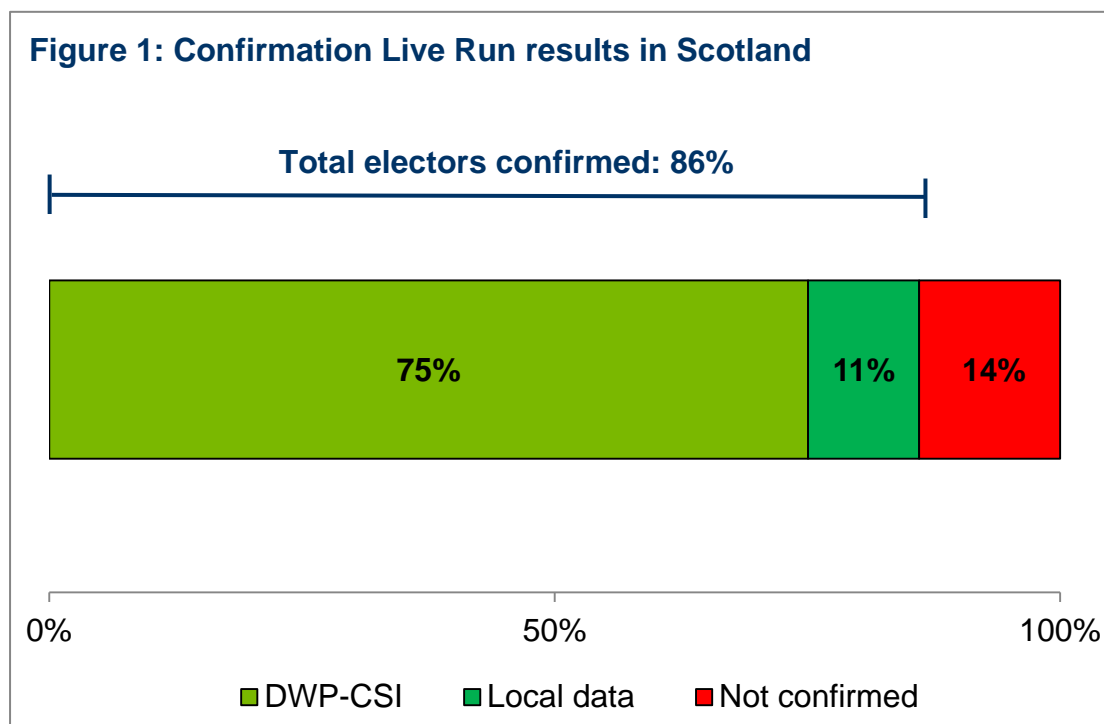
Confirmation live run

2.1 The first stage in the transition to IER involved the matching of existing entries on the electoral registers against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database as well as locally held data, in order to identify which records could be automatically transferred to the IER registers. This process, known as the confirmation live run (CLR), began in Scotland on 22 September 2014.¹⁹

2.2 Entries for electors that could be positively matched were confirmed and transferred directly to the new IER register. Those individuals not matched were written to by their ERO and asked to re-register by providing additional information (National Insurance number (NINO) and date of birth).

2.3 Based on the CLR data matching (figure 1 below):

- 86% of entries on the September registers in Scotland – totalling 3.6 million register entries - were positively matched and directly transferred to the new IER register;
- 14% of entries – totalling approximately 590,000 - could not be matched.²⁰



¹⁹ A dry-run of this process – known as the ‘confirmation dry run (CDR)’ – was carried out in summer 2013.

²⁰ The full dataset can be accessed on the Electoral Commission’s website:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>

2.4 191,000 additional records were sent for matching than had been sent for the CDR in summer 2013. This represents a 4.7% increase – significantly greater than the 0.15% increase across England and Wales between CDR and CLR – reflecting the high number of people who registered to vote in the lead-up to the independence referendum.

2.5 The scale of the challenge facing EROs after the CLR varied across Scotland as the proportion of electors matched at council and ward level varied considerably. Across council areas it ranged from 78% in Glasgow to 93% in Clackmannanshire, and by ward the rate ranged from 63% in Glasgow’s Anderston-City ward to 94% in Annandale South in Dumfries and Galloway.

2.6 In addition, our published analysis of the CLR results – carried out at ward level using demographic data – found that areas with higher concentrations of private renters, young people, students and people not born in the UK had a lower match rate. People in these groups were also found to be less likely to be correctly registered, mainly as a result of population movement (more likely to move home) and participation in the electoral process (less likely to vote).²¹

2.7 On receipt of their CLR results, EROs were able to review their public engagement strategies – which had been developed based on results from the dry-run of the confirmation process carried out in summer 2013 - in order to ensure they had the right plans in place to be able to target those who were not confirmed or not currently registered at all.

2.8 We worked with EROs and their staff during this period to support them with reviewing their plans and, subsequently, to monitor their progress with delivering them.

The write-out

2.9 The write-out involved EROs sending confirmation letters to those electors who were confirmed through the CLR process and so could be automatically transferred onto the new IER register; and invitations to register to those who were not confirmed. In Scotland this process began from 13 October 2014 and ran until February, prior to the revised registers being published by 2 March.²²

2.10 Electors who were positively matched as part of the confirmation process were sent a confirmation letter informing them that they had been automatically transferred on to the IER registers and did not need to take any additional action.

²¹ The Electoral Commission, [Analysis of the Confirmation Live Run in Scotland](#) (October 2014) All our studies on electoral registration found a strong link between population mobility and turnout and electoral registration. Reports are available on the Electoral Commission’s website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>

²² The precise start date of the write-out varied between EROs as a result of factors including the local data matching processes they followed and how long they took and practical factors such as IT systems and arrangements for printing and delivering letters and forms.

2.11 Electors who could not be positively matched and automatically transferred to the new IER registers were sent an invitation to register, informing them that they needed to re-register by providing some more information and providing details of how to do this.

2.12 Anyone who could not provide the required information – National Insurance Number (NINO) and date of birth – could use an exceptions or attestation process in order to become individually registered.²³

2.13 It is important to note that no-one will be removed from the register as a result of the change to the registration system before the end of the transition period.

2.14 To support the write-out, the Commission ran a public awareness campaign in Scotland from 16 October until 13 November which included TV, outdoor and online advertising. The aim of the campaign was to support local ERO activity by encouraging people to look out for their letter.

2.15 We undertook tracking research to evaluate the effectiveness of the campaign, which found that:

- 64% of respondents recognised any element of our campaign, which exceeded our key performance measure (KPM) of between 50-60%
- 70% of respondents reported being aware of the change to the voter registration system, exceeding our KPM of between 50-60%
- 74% of respondents stated it was true that they needed to look out for a letter about registering to vote from their local council, which exceeded our KPM of 40-50%

Household enquiry forms

2.16 EROs were also required to send Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – to those properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered.

2.17 The processes followed in late 2014/early 2015 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in summer 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending

²³ The *exceptions* process is used by EROs when an elector cannot be matched against DWP records or using local data sources, or where the applicant cannot provide some or all of the required personal identifiers required to register. It involves asking the applicant to provide documentary evidence to prove their identity. Where the applicant cannot be matched and cannot provide the required personal identifiers or documentary evidence, the *attestation* process is used. This involves a 'person of good standing' on the electoral register verifying the identity of the applicant. Further information on both processes is available in [Part 4 of our guidance for Electoral Registration Officers](#).

household enquiry forms to all properties to check who is resident at an address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register.

When does an ERO remove an entry from the register?

2.18 An elector will remain registered at a particular address unless and until the ERO determines that:

- the person was not entitled to be registered in respect of the address, or
- the person has ceased to be resident at the address or otherwise ceased to satisfy the conditions for registration

2.19 An entry can only be deleted from the electoral register in the following circumstances:

- Where an ERO receives:
 - a death certificate confirming that the elector has died
 - a notification by the registrar of births and deaths confirming that the elector has died
 - a notification by the digital service or another ERO confirming that the elector has moved and is now registered elsewhere
 - two pieces of evidence from two different sources confirming that the elector is no longer entitled to be registered at that address
- Where an ERO believes an elector is no longer entitled to be registered and they have undertaken a formal 'review' of that elector's entitlement to remain on the register at a particular address.²⁴

Public engagement

2.20 In the lead up to the referendum in September 2014 EROs undertook significant activity to ensure that as many eligible electors as possible were registered to vote. Building on the household canvass that took place over the period of 1 October 2013 to 10 March 2014, EROs carried out a wide range of public awareness activities, ranging from issuing press releases and placing posters in public spaces to using council vehicles to carry advertising about the referendum. Social media was also a key communication channel, with Twitter being particularly widely used.

²⁴ Reviews are quasi-judicial processes where electors are notified of the fact that their entitlement to remain is being reviewed, giving the reasons why. Depending on the type of review, electors are given the opportunity to request a hearing or supply further information in connection with their entitlement to remain registered. In some limited circumstances, the ERO will notify the elector that they intend to hold a hearing within a period of between 3 and 7 working days.

2.21 EROs have since continued to evaluate and update their public engagement strategies to understand what challenges remain locally and to reflect the updated information about which groups of electors they need to continue to target in their areas. As well as the work being undertaken locally by EROs, the Commission and a wide range of other organisations have and continue to promote registration more generally in order to ensure that as many people as possible are registered and so able to participate in the May 2015 election.

National Voter Registration Day

2.22 National Voter Registration Day (NVRD) took place on Thursday 5 February 2015 and was supported by a wide range of organisations and individuals across Scotland and the rest of the UK, including the Commission.

2.23 NVRD saw a range of events taking place to promote voter registration. There was also significant activity on social media to direct people to the online registration site, including the Commission's partnership with Facebook, which saw information about registration placed in the newsfeeds of millions of Facebook users.

2.24 To support NVRD, the Commission also created a number of resources – including posters, web buttons and banners – for EROs and other organisations to use in their promotional work on this day to highlight the need to register to vote. Our social media activity on 5 February highlighted the availability of online registration, which has helped to make the registration process more accessible for everyone.

2.25 In addition to NVRD, Overseas Voter Registration Day (OVRD) also took place on 5 February. This was coordinated by the Commission and had the objective of informing as many UK citizens living overseas as possible that they may be eligible to register to vote in the UK Parliamentary General Election on 7 May 2015 and encouraging them to apply to register online. In addition to sharing a suite of resources for our partners with overseas reach to use, OVRD activity included issuing targeted press releases, a dedicated social media campaign and local radio interviews. This activity was supported by our main overseas campaign online which was launched on 2 February and includes advertising in the top twenty most popular destination countries for British expats. OVRD was also supported by activity by the Cabinet Office and Foreign and Commonwealth Office.

2.26 Both NVRD and OVRD generated significant media coverage, both domestically and overseas. This coverage and the activity that took place on the day clearly helped to encourage online registration applications – 166,140 applications to register to vote in Great Britain were made on NVRD alone. They also provided increased visibility of the work that a range of organisations – including those working in partnership with the Commission - are doing to get people registered, encouraging others to get involved. We welcome the success that this initiative has had since its initial launch by Bite the Ballot in 2014.

The revised registers

2.27 Following the write-out process explained above, EROs in Scotland were required to publish their revised register by 2 March 2015.

2.28 The publication of the revised registers was a key milestone in the progress of the transition to IER, but it is important to note that the registers do not remain static, and considerable work is being, and will continue to be, undertaken to maximise the number of people registered for the May 2015 election.

2.29 In Scotland, while the window between the last date for publication of the revised register (2 March 2015) and the registration deadline for the May 2015 election (20 April 2015) is short, there are still opportunities for EROs and others to carry out work to ensure that the registers are as accurate and complete as possible by the time of the May 2015 election. Further information on continuing registration activity can be found in Chapter 4 of this report.

Who should have been included on the revised registers?

2.30 The revised registers should have included the following:

- Electors who were included in the register before the transition and were confirmed.
- Electors who were included in the register before the transition and who were not confirmed but have responded to the write-out and successfully completed an individual registration application.
- Electors who were not previously registered in an area but have now successfully completed an individual registration application in respect of a particular address.
- Electors who were included in the register before the transition but were not confirmed and have not successfully completed an individual registration application subsequent to the write-out. These electors are no longer entitled to vote by post or proxy unless they submit a successful application to register individually and an application to vote by post or proxy. They can, however, vote in person at their allocated polling station and will not be removed from the register because of the change to IER until the end of the transition, which will be in December 2016 unless there is a change in the law.

Who would not have been included in the revised registers?

2.31 There are only two circumstances in which an entry which previously appeared on the register would not have been included in the revised register published by 2 March:

- EROs will have removed any existing entries where they were satisfied that the individual is no longer entitled to remain registered at that address.
- EROs were required to remove any entries for individuals in households who did not respond to the 2013 canvass which were carried forward on to the March 2014 registers, and where the individual has not subsequently responded to the ERO's enquiries.²⁵

2.32 Entries in the first category will be those in respect of which the ERO has obtained additional new information since September 2014 causing them to believe that the individual is no longer entitled to be registered at a particular address. Except in a number of limited circumstances (i.e. notification by the registrar of births and deaths, death certificate, notification by another ERO or the digital service), the ERO will have needed either information from two separate sources or to have completed a formal 'review' of that elector's entitlement to remain on the register at that address before they can remove an entry from the electoral register. A change to council tax records, for example, could indicate to the ERO that an elector has moved, but they would need a second piece of evidence to support this before they would be able to remove the entry from the register.

2.33 On publication of the March 2014 registers, EROs could carry forward entries for electors whose household had not responded to the 2013 canvass. By law, EROs in Scotland were required to delete entries relating to any such carried-forward electors at the end of the 2014/15 write-out process if they had not received a completed HEF with their name included on it or if the individual had not made a successful individual registration application.








2.34 Under the previous registration system, if the ERO was not able to satisfy themselves that the elector was still entitled to be registered at that particular address they would have been removed after having been carried forward for one year. In 2014/15, under the transitional provisions, in order to be able to retain an elector who hadn't responded to the 2013 canvass, some active response was required (for example, through the inclusion of their name on a completed HEF) and EROs could not retain such individuals without this additional response even where data matching suggested that they may still be resident.

²⁵ The 2013 canvass was moved, to bring it closer to the start of the confirmation process, in order to maximise the accuracy and completeness of the registers sent for matching (and therefore to maximise the number of entries that could be matched and automatically transferred to the new IER registers). This meant that the registers following what is referred to as the 2013 canvass were published in March 2014.

2.35 The revised register does not include those on the young voters register at the referendum – unless they now qualify as an attainer (i.e. they are aged 16 or 17 years of age and will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application) and they have successfully applied to be on the register.

2.36 The following table illustrates which entries should and would not have been included in the revised registers:

Table 1 – Categories of elector and their inclusion on revised registers

Type of elector	Included on revised register?
New electors who have made a successful application	
Confirmed existing electors who were matched against official records	
Unconfirmed existing electors who could not be matched, were invited to register, and made a successful application	
Unconfirmed existing electors who could not be matched, were invited to register, but did not respond or were unsuccessful	
Carry-forward electors – those who did not respond to the 2013 canvass – who have returned a HEF with their name included on it and been confirmed, or have made a successful application to register	
Carry-forward electors – those who did not respond to the 2013 canvass and have not returned a HEF which included their name; or their name is crossed off on a returned HEF; or they have not made a successful application to register	
No longer eligible – electors deleted where the ERO has reviewed an elector’s entry; or received confirmation that the elector has died; or has moved	

Household notification letters

2.37 For all EROs, the period leading up to the May 2015 election, provides an opportunity to:

- encourage those people missing from the register to apply
- check that there are no inaccurate entries in the register

2.38 Sending a letter to all households showing who is registered to vote at that particular address can contribute to helping EROs to ensure that their registers are as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May election.

2.39 In December 2014 we strongly recommended that EROs across Great Britain undertake an audit of their registers and **write to all households** – regardless of whether or not they currently have any registered electors – in early 2015, in good time before the May elections.

2.40 We provided detailed guidance to support EROs in preparing for and carrying out this registration activity and a template letter for this purpose. This ‘household notification letter’ (HNL) shows who is registered to vote at that particular address and prompts anyone who is not yet registered to do so.

2.41 This approach has a number of clear benefits, all of which can contribute to helping EROs to ensure that their registers are as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the May election:

- Prompting those who have not yet registered – including 16 and 17 year olds - to do so
- Helping to pick up those who have recently moved within or into the registration area
- Giving residents an opportunity to check their details on the register are accurate

2.42 The Commission welcomed Cabinet Office’s January 2015 announcement that £6.8 million would be made available to EROs across Great Britain to support activity to maximise registration – many EROs have used their share to fund sending out HNLs.

2.43 EROs in England and Wales carried out this work in January/February following publication of the revised registers in December 2014. However, as a result of the later start to the transition in Scotland, the write-out activity which had been largely completed in November 2014 in England and Wales continued into 2015 in Scotland. Regardless, EROs across Scotland recognised the significant value in carrying out an audit of their registers before the May 2015 election, particularly given the lack of

comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. All EROs in Scotland confirmed that this activity was carried out throughout February and March.

2.44 For the majority of EROs in Scotland, HNL activity commenced following the publication of the revised register, although in some cases letters were sent in February shortly before publication. In any case, the timing of this activity means that its impact will not have been reflected in the revised registers, although initial anecdotal feedback from EROs on the impact of these letters has been positive.

3 The revised registers

3.1 Data presented in this chapter illustrates the state of the revised registers published by the 15 Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) – representing all 32 council areas – in Scotland.²⁶

3.2 Our analysis is based on figures provided to us by EROs via their Electoral Management Software (EMS) systems (whether provided by a commercial supplier or developed and maintained in-house), research studies conducted on the registers and historic data.²⁷

Limits to the analysis

3.3 Each ERO has their own electoral management software (EMS) system that they use to manage their electoral register. In Scotland, three EROs, representing seven local councils, have in-house EMS systems that they have designed and manage themselves which they use to administer the electoral registration process. The remainder have arrangements in place with a commercial EMS system supplier. Both the in-house developers and EMS suppliers worked directly with the Cabinet Office to ensure their systems were adapted as necessary for the transition to IER.

3.4 Our report on the 1 December registers in England and Wales, published in February 2014, highlighted that we had encountered some issues with the management information functionality of the EMS systems which had an impact on the quality of the data we received. We have encountered similar issues during the collection of data in Scotland, resulting in not all EROs being able to provide the accurate management information data that we expected.

3.5 Our report is therefore less precise than we had hoped and, as for England and Wales, we have had to focus on headline measures only. There are also elements of the analysis we carried out for England and Wales that we have not been able to replicate for Scotland. This is largely because the large number of local authorities in England and Wales allowed us to create a reasonable sample even in the absence of data from some areas, whereas the smaller number of local councils in Scotland makes that more challenging. In addition, some EROs have told us that they do not believe the data produced by their system is accurate and so where we have not been able to clarify a figure with an ERO, we have omitted it from our analysis.

3.6 This report therefore presents an overall assessment of the state of the revised registers in Scotland but not a detailed analysis of progress with the transition to IER. In particular, at this stage we cannot provide an accurate picture of the composition of the registers illustrating the number of electors who have been confirmed or

²⁶ There are 32 local authorities in Scotland and 27 of them are part of Valuation Joint Boards (VJBs). Appendix A lists each local authority in Scotland and where relevant, which VJB they are part of.

²⁷ Our research studies on electoral registration can be accessed at:

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>

registered under IER, although we are able to give a robust estimate of the number of existing electors who are not registered individually and who must make an individual registration application if they are to remain on the register after the end of the transition.

3.7 These data issues have not only had a significant impact on our ability to report on progress with implementing the transition to date, but they have also created a real risk that the Commission will not have sufficient information to be able to make a robust, evidence-based recommendation in June 2015 to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to recommend to the UK Parliament that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward.

3.8 Since the publication of our report on England and Wales in February, the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data we plan to collect relating to the registers in force for the May 2015 elections will be more accurate and reliable. In particular, there have been regular meetings to ensure there is a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data is intended to cover. This work has focused on improving data collected around the May 2015 registers, and it was not possible to improve the process in time to collect data on the revised registers in Scotland.

3.9 We will continue to work with the Cabinet Office, EMS suppliers and in-house system developers in order to improve the data for our next report. Without reliable data about electoral registration in June 2015, it is highly unlikely that the Commission would be able to recommend in any circumstances that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

Total electorate in Scotland

3.10 Based on the data collected for all 32 council areas in Scotland, the total number of entries on the revised registers in Scotland at 2 March 2015 was **4,138,345**. This figure includes those registered as attainers (i.e. those aged 16 or 17 years of age who will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application).

3.11 The register has increased marginally from the register published in March 2014 – by 17,851 register entries, corresponding to 0.4% of the March 2014 register. This compares to a decrease of approximately 2% in England and Wales where the December 2014 registers contained approximately 920,000 fewer entries than the registers published in February/March 2014.²⁸ The table below provides a summary of the total number of entries on the registers in Scotland during the period of 2010 – 2015.

3.12 It is important to note that each entry on the electoral register may not necessarily equate to an actual resident elector in an area, as the register may contain redundant and duplicate entries. For example, when an elector moves to a

²⁸ In England and Wales, EROs published revised electoral registers on 1 December 2014 and we reported on the registers and progress with the transition in England and Wales in February 2015.

new address there will often be a lag before their register entry at their previous address is removed.

Table 2: Total number of entries on the local government electoral registers in Scotland: 2010 – 2015

Date	Total number of register entries	Variation from previous register
December 2010	3,985,161	1.7%
December 2011	4,008,411	0.6%
December 2012	4,063,206	1.4%
March 2014 ²⁹	4,120,494	1.4%
September 2014	4,283,938	4%
March 2015	4,138,345	-3.4%

Source: GROS Electoral Statistics and Electoral Commission

3.13 While there has been an overall increase from March 2014 – March 2015, there are 145,593 fewer entries on the revised register than were registered to vote at the referendum, which indicates a decrease of approximately 3.4%.

3.14 However, it is important to remember that the number of those registered to vote at the referendum includes **all** those eligible to vote in the referendum, including 16 and 17 year olds, some of whom would not have been eligible to be included on the March 2015 registers because of their age. This means that comparing the total electorate at the referendum with the total electorate in March 2015 risks overstating the level of the decrease.

3.15 The total number of those registered to vote at the referendum included a total of 109,593 16 and 17 year olds. If we compare the number of electors aged 18 or over at the referendum (4,174,324) with the equivalent number for March 2015 (4,097,732) we find a decrease in the electorate of -1.8%.³⁰

3.16 The lack of comprehensive household canvass activity since the end of the 2013 canvass is likely to be a key reason for this fall. Household Enquiry Forms

²⁹ The 2013 canvass was moved to bring it closer to the start of the confirmation process, in order to maximise the accuracy and completeness of the registers sent for matching (and therefore to maximise the number of entries that could be matched and automatically transferred to the new IER registers). This meant that the registers following what is referred to as the 2013 canvass were published in March 2014.

³⁰ The figure for the registers in force at the time of the referendum include those 16 and 17 year olds eligible to vote at the poll. While the March 2014 and March 2014 registers also include any registered 16 and 17 year olds as attainers. Compared to the number of 16 year olds registered for the referendum, the number of 16 year old attainers is small as, in order to be included, they need to turn 18 during the period the register is in force while any eligible 16 year old could vote at the referendum.

(HEFs) – which are designed to identify who is living at a property and eligible to register so that the ERO can invite them to register to vote – were only required to be sent to properties where no electors were registered, or where the ERO believed there may still be other people living at the address who were not registered.

3.17 This means that home-movers have not been captured as effectively as they would have been during a typical annual canvass where all households would receive a form. The processes followed in 2014/15 were unique in this regard; canvass activity in the summer and autumn of 2015 and all subsequent years will involve sending household enquiry forms to all properties to check who is resident at an address and to identify new electors who can subsequently be invited to register, and carrying out follow up activity as required.

3.18 In our report on England and Wales, we used data on the levels of additions to and deletions from the registers to illustrate that the decrease in the electorate there, year-on-year, was a result of the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014. Our analysis indicated that home movement was not picked up as effectively and, unusually, that the number of register entries deleted outstripped the number of electors added to the registers.

3.19 While the data that is available does not allow us to present the same level of analysis for Scotland, logically, the fact that there has been a decline in the electorate tells us that, as in England and Wales, the levels of deletions has been greater than the number of additions. Also, evidence from the few local council areas for which we do have data on the levels of additions suggest a similar finding for Scotland as for England and Wales – in that the level of additions appears lower than is usually the case following a household canvass.

3.20 To fill this gap, EROs have been sending household notification letters (HNLs) to every household in their area which show who is registered to vote at that particular address and will prompt anyone who is not yet registered – including attainers – to do so. Initial anecdotal feedback from EROs on the impact of these letters has been positive. Further information on this activity can be found in Chapter 2 of our report.

3.21 In addition to the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity, we also believe that some of the decline between the referendum and March 2015 may be accounted for by the specific circumstances of the referendum, including:

- The referendum acted as a catalyst for people registering to vote and large numbers were added ahead of the poll. This naturally meant that fewer would be added in the months following the poll (because they had already recently renewed or checked their registration details)
- The significant volumes of registration applications processed shortly before polling day impacted on the overall numbers on the registers at the time of the referendum. As set out above, each entry on the electoral register may not necessarily equate to an actual resident elector in an area, as the register may contain redundant and duplicate entries. When an elector registers at a new address there can often be a lag before their register entry at their previous

address is removed. This may explain why, following the referendum, there were more deletions than additions.

3.22 The size of the registers in force for the referendum therefore represented a high point against which any subsequent registers were more likely to decrease than increase. Unlike in England and Wales, the registers are, overall, larger than they were 12 months before (in March 2014). This is likely to be because the referendum went some way towards mitigating the impact of the lack of a full canvass in Scotland by encouraging registrations. The May 2014 elections did not have an equivalent impact on registrations in England and Wales.

Attainers

3.23 The number of registered attainers in March 2015 was 40,613. This is a significant decrease (-37%) on the registers published in March 2014. This is likely to be due in part to the fact that the number of registered attainers in March 2014 was unusually high, most likely as a consequence of the registration of 16 and 17 year olds ahead of the independence referendum - a poll in which they were entitled to vote. Compared back to December 2012, there are 6,095 fewer attainers in March 2015 (-15%).

Table 3: Total number of attainers on the local government electoral register in Scotland: 2010 – 2015

Date	Total number of register entries	Variation from previous year
December 2010	44,415	-3.8%
December 2011	44,341	-0.2%
December 2012	46,726	5.4%
March 2014 ³¹	64,299	37.6%
March 2015	40,613	-36.8%

3.24 The fall in the number of attainers does not mean that those who were previously included on the register as attainers have been removed: attainers on the register previously will, in many cases, have reached voting age since they were first included on the revised register and so will now be shown as ordinary electors. However, it does mean that new attainers are not being added at the same rate as in

³¹ The 2013 canvass was moved, to bring it closer to the start of the confirmation process, in order to maximise the accuracy and completeness of the register sent for matching (and therefore to maximise the number of electors confirmed and moved automatically onto the new IER registers). This meant that the registers in Scotland, following what is referred to as the 2013 canvass were published in March 2014, and not December 2013.

previous years. Again the lack of comprehensive household canvass activity in 2014/15 will have been relevant in this regard.

3.25 There is clearly a challenge for EROs and others to carry out further work to maximise the number of attainers on the electoral registers. Further details of work being undertaken to reach attainers and to increase the registration levels of that group can be found in Chapter 4 of our report.

Postal voters

3.26 Across Scotland, the number of registered postal voters in March 2015 is 683,989. Compared to data collected at the time of the independence referendum, this represents a decrease in registered postal voters of around 113,000.

3.27 We do not have reliable data across Scotland on the number of existing electors who lost their postal vote due to not being registered individually but anecdotally the numbers are small relative to the total decrease.³² Feedback from EROs indicates that a key reason for the reduction in numbers of postal voters is likely to be that many people specifically opted to have a postal vote at the referendum (due to holidays, for example) then reverted back to being polling station voters.

3.28 In order to ensure that those who want to vote by post or proxy are able to do so, EROs were required by law to write to all electors who, on publication of the revised register, lost their absent vote entitlement, within one month of the publication of the revised registers. These communications will have served as a further prompt to those electors to register individually, reminding them that they will need to take further action if they want to vote by post in the May 2015 election or subsequently.

Local variation

3.29 While the total number of electoral register entries in Scotland increased by 0.4% from the March 2014 figures, the variation at a local level ranges from -4% to +4%.

3.30 Table 4 below presents the variation between the March 2014 and March 2015 registers and between the September 2014 referendum registers and the March 2015 registers. The table shows that between the referendum and March 2015, all areas recorded a decrease in the total number of register entries (all electors) from March 2014 with 16 areas decreasing by -4% or more.

³² Any existing elector who was not registered individually by the time of publication of the revised register – whether as a consequence of having been confirmed or as a result of having completed a successful application to register individually – will have lost their absent vote entitlement. These electors remain on the register and can still vote in person at their allocated polling station, but they will not be able to vote by post at the 7 May 2015 elections unless they apply to register individually and re-apply for a postal vote before 5pm on 21 April 2015.

Table 4: Total number of electoral register entries (all electors) – Variations as percentage of March 2014 register

Difference in total number of register entries	Number of council areas in this range March 2014 to March 2015	Number of council areas in this range September 2014 to March 2015
+4%	1	0
+2%	4	0
+1%	7	0
No variation (0%)	7	1
-1%	7	4
-2%	4	11
-4%	2	16

3.31 The table below shows all 32 local council areas in Scotland and the number of entries on the register on 2 March 2015 for each area. It also shows the change from March 2014 as well as from the registers in force for the referendum (for all electors and 18+ electors only). As with the overall figures, the largest decreases are shown from the referendum registers (including all those eligible to vote at the referendum, including 16 and 17 year olds) to March 2015.

3.32 Compared to March 2014, the results range from Perth and Kinross (-4%) and Stirling (-4%) where the register has reduced in size, to Edinburgh (+4%) where there has been an increase. Compared to the referendum register for all electors, the March 2015 figures all show a decrease but these range from Perth and Kinross at -8% to Edinburgh and Glasgow at -1%. If only electors aged 18 or over are included, the decreases are smaller although the areas with the largest and smallest changes remain the same.

Table X: Total number of March 2015 electoral register entries – Variations as a percentage of the March 2014 and September 2014 registers

Local council area	Total number of entries (March 2015)	Variation from March 2014	Variation from Sept 2014 (all electors)	Variation from Sept 2014 (electors aged 18 or over)
Aberdeen City	169,909	-2%	-3%	-2%

Aberdeenshire	201,652	0%	-2%	-1%
Angus	91,070	1%	-3%	-1%
Argyll and Bute	69,602	0%	-3%	-2%
City of Edinburgh	374,033	4%	-1%	0%
Clackmannanshire	37,790	-2%	-6%	-4%
Dumfries and Galloway	116,006	-1%	-5%	-3%
Dundee City	110,159	0%	-7%	-6%
East Ayrshire	95,301	-1%	-4%	-3%
East Dunbartonshire	84,601	1%	-3%	-1%
East Lothian	80,439	1%	-2%	0%
East Renfrewshire	69,437	1%	-5%	-3%
Eilean Siar	21,793	-2%	-5%	-3%
Falkirk	116,099	-2%	-5%	-4%
Fife	288,624	-1%	-5%	-3%
Glasgow City	480,037	1%	-1%	0%
Highland	181,602	-1%	-5%	-3%
Inverclyde	58,279	-1%	-7%	-5%
Midlothian	68,467	2%	-2%	0%
Moray	73,178	1%	-3%	-1%
North Ayrshire	108,923	-1%	-4%	-3%
North Lanarkshire	259,015	0%	-4%	-2%
Orkney Islands	16,958	0%	-5%	-3%
Perth and Kinross	110,515	-4%	-8%	-6%
Renfrewshire	126,022	0%	-7%	-5%

Scottish Borders	91,854	0%	-4%	-2%
Shetland Islands	18,076	2%	-2%	-1%
South Ayrshire	91,043	-1%	-4%	-2%
South Lanarkshire	252,961	1%	-3%	-2%
Stirling	65,738	-4%	-5%	-3%
West Dunbartonshire	69,371	2%	-3%	-1%
West Lothian	137,201	2%	-1%	1%

3.33 These variations are likely to be due to a combination of demographic factors and electoral registration practices (such as the number of entries carried forward from the 2013 canvass).³³

Attainer and postal voter variation

Attainers

3.34 There is significant variation between local council areas in the change in the number of attainers between March 2014 and March 2015. This ranges from a decrease of -56% to an increase of 30%, with 25 of the 32 areas showing a decrease. As Table 8 below shows, the decrease is less significant between December 2012 and March 2015, although there is still substantial variation.

Table 8: Total number of attainers – Local variations

Local council area	Total number of attainers (March 2015)	Variation against March 2014	Variation against December 2012
Aberdeen City	1,414	-52%	-23%
Aberdeenshire	2,258	-54%	-13%
Angus	856	-54%	-18%
Argyll and Bute	587	-54%	-23%

³³ On publication of the March 2014 registers, EROs could carry forward entries for electors whose household had not responded to the 2013 canvass. By law, EROs in Scotland were required to delete entries relating to any such carried-forward electors at the end of the 2014/15 write-out process if they had not received a completed HEF with their name included on it or if the individual had not made a successful individual registration application.

City of Edinburgh	2,882	-53%	7%
Clackmannanshire	400	-51%	-27%
Dumfries and Galloway	594	-34%	-49%
Dundee City	1,060	-54%	-2%
East Ayrshire	917	7%	-21%
East Dunbartonshire	796	-52%	-32%
East Lothian	804	-55%	1%
East Renfrewshire	862	-56%	-21%
Eilean Siar	203	-9%	-39%
Falkirk	1,140	-53%	-16%
Fife	3,029	6%	-24%
Glasgow City	5,022	9%	20%
Highland	1985	7%	-23%
Inverclyde	615	-56%	-29%
Midlothian	649	-53%	9%
Moray	885	-55%	-10%
North Ayrshire	1,123	-8%	-32%
North Lanarkshire	2,652	-6%	4%
Orkney Islands	189	9%	-27%
Perth and Kinross	1,077	-56%	-27%
Renfrewshire	1,367	-55%	-19%
Scottish Borders	993	16%	2%
Shetland Islands	229	31%	-5%
South Ayrshire	796	-13%	-28%
South Lanarkshire	2,453	-8%	1%
Stirling	749	-52%	-30%

West Dunbartonshire	521	-53%	-36%
West Lothian	1,506	-52%	-8%

Postal voters

3.35 Data received from EROs shows a significant variation in the level of decrease (between the referendum and March 2015) in those electors registered for a postal vote. The decrease ranges from -3% to -26%. As noted above, we believe the overall decline is at least partly attributable to electors specifically choosing to have a postal vote for the referendum (due to holidays, for example) and subsequently reverting to being a polling station voter.

Table 8: Total number of postal voters – Local variations

Local council areas	Total number of postal voters (March 2015)	Variation against postal votes issued at the independence referendum
Aberdeen City	33,571	-19%
Aberdeenshire	38,987	-17%
Angus	16,123	-5%
Argyll and Bute	12,972	-10%
City of Edinburgh	70,610	-15%
Clackmannanshire	4,286	-22%
Dumfries and Galloway	23,447	-15%
Dundee City	20,999	-5%
East Ayrshire	13,481	-17%
East Dunbartonshire	12,742	-15%
East Lothian	14,491	-13%
East Renfrewshire	13,814	-16%
Eilean Siar	3,992	-22%
Falkirk	12,813	-23%
Fife	46,602	-18%

Glasgow City	68,421	-9%
Highland	30,796	-21%
Inverclyde	12,220	-13%
Midlothian	12,037	-13%
Moray	13,060	-18%
North Ayrshire	15,844	-18%
North Lanarkshire	34,827	-4%
Orkney Islands	3,762	-16%
Perth and Kinross	19,295	-18%
Renfrewshire	25,105	-14%
Scottish Borders	11,063	-26%
Shetland Islands	2,343	-22%
South Ayrshire	16,931	-17%
South Lanarkshire	39,433	-3%
Stirling	8,127	-25%
West Dunbartonshire	8,727	-10%
West Lothian	23,068	-11%

Entries retained on the registers

3.36 In assessing the progress of the transition to IER, the volume of register entries being retained on the registers (i.e. those entries relating to existing electors who are not registered individually as they have not been confirmed and have not made a successful individual registration application) is a key piece of information. Without further action by the elector it relates to, such entries will be removed at the end of the transition period – currently set for December 2016. There have been issues with the data returned relating to such entries although we have sought to clarify these figures directly with EROs in order to be able to report reliably.

3.37 We have received reliable data for 29 local authority areas which indicates that 6% of entries on the March 2015 registers have been retained. Applied across Scotland, that equates to approximately 250,000 register entries

3.38 We know that approximately 590,000 register entries could not be matched through confirmation. This data shows that 250,000 of them remain on the registers without yet having completed a successful application to register individually, but the data issues mean we cannot say how many of the other 340,000 have re-registered under IER and how many were not included in the March 2015 registers.

3.39 The available data does indicate that there is some variation in the level of entries being retained across local council areas with figures ranging from 3% to 8% of the register for a local council area consisting of retained entries.

3.40 This piece of data will be a key element of the Commission's June 2015 report on the progress of the transition.

4 Continuing work to maximise registration

4.1 The revised registers provided a snapshot of how the registers stood at 2 March 2015 and reflect the significant activity EROs have been – and are continuing – to undertake to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote in respect of the correct address in advance of the May 2015 election.

4.2 Since 2 March 2015, 127,358 registration applications have been made.³⁴ However, while this is clearly positive, it doesn't necessarily reflect an increase of that level in the number of entries on the electoral register: for example, some of these will be duplicate applications from those already included on the electoral register, and others will be from movers who are applying to be added at one address but will consequently be removed from the register at their previous address.

4.3 As detailed in our analysis in Chapter 3, the revised registers have highlighted an increase in the overall number of entries on the registers since March 2014, but they do also show a decrease from the September referendum register.

4.4 This chapter provides information on some of the work still being undertaken by EROs, the Commission and a wide range of other organisations to promote registration in order to ensure that as many people as possible are able to participate in the 7 May 2015 election.

Action to target young people

4.5 Our previous research has identified certain groups which are associated with low levels of electoral registration – including young people and students.

4.6 To help meet these challenges, the NUS, the Association of Colleges (AoC), Universities UK, the Academic Registrars Council (ARC), the Association of Heads of University Administration (AHUA), GuildHE and the Commission have worked together to ask for the support of all Vice Chancellors and College Principals across Scotland, and also in England and Wales, in undertaking a few simple actions to let their students know about the importance of registering to vote, and reminding them that they can now register to vote online. These representatives have been asked to arrange for their institutions to email all their students with details of how to register, to hold registration drives in tutorials or lectures and to work with their local students' unions to share information about registering. These activities will complement the work of local EROs to target students and young people and will continue right up to the registration deadline.

³⁴ Figures reflect the total number of registration applications received in Scotland from 2 March 2015 – 30 March 2015 (inclusive).

4.7 To further support the work currently underway to encourage registration by young people and students, the Commission is working in partnership with Facebook. Following on from the activity that took place on NVRD, Facebook users are also now able to add a 'Registered to Vote' Life Event to their Facebook Timeline which can then be shared with their contacts on Facebook to further increase awareness levels in young people. This is particularly important in relation to reaching students as they are one of the key demographics who interact with Facebook on a daily basis.

4.8 EROs are also trialling new approaches in their work to target registration activity at young people and this includes exploring opportunities for harnessing modern technologies. For example the EROs for Ayrshire, Dundee and Renfrewshire are currently piloting a new smartphone app targeted at attainers, first time voters and students. The app provides users with regularly updated information on voting as well as a direct link to the online registration portal. The app is being promoted through local schools, colleges, universities and youth groups and the results of the pilot will be evaluated following the May 2015 election.

4.9 Additionally, the Commission's public awareness campaign includes activity which is designed to target students and young people. We have developed two specific strands of advertising to increase understanding amongst students that they need to be registered to vote at their term-time address in order to be able to vote in their university constituency and also to boost understanding amongst those who have just turned 18 or will do so before the May 2015 election that they need to take positive action to ensure that they are registered. Further information on the Commission's public awareness campaign can be found below.

Partnership working

4.10 As part of our voter information campaign for the Scottish Independence Referendum, we have already successfully worked with partners such as Shelter Scotland, Young Scot, the Scottish Youth Parliament, NUS Scotland and Universities Scotland to reach audiences who are less likely to be registered or face additional barriers to voting. This work continued as part of our public awareness activity to support the write-out process in 2014/15, where we developed partnerships with a wide range of corporate, public and voluntary organisations to use their established communication channels to help extend our reach into groups we have identified as being typically under-registered. [A full list of our partners is available on our website.](#)

4.11 Partnership working is important to help build on, promote and complement the work that is already going on to ensure that as many people as possible are registered to vote. We are working with organisations such as the National Union of Students Scotland (NUS), Citizens Advice Bureau, the Learner Driving Centre and Mencap to draw on their experiences and target messages at various groups and encourage voter registration amongst their key target audiences, which include groups who are typically under-registered. Such organisations have far greater reach into under registered groups than any single national body could achieve by itself,

while they also help to explain the message in a way that resonates with voters in different contexts.

4.12 Our partners are undertaking various pieces of work to help promote voter registration, which we have also supported and promoted. For example: Mencap have produced an Easy Read guide specifically designed to help those people with learning disabilities engage in the democratic process; Red Driving School have provided wallet cards with information about how to get registered to their learner drivers; and organisations such as Which? and Nationwide have included information about registration through online channels that home movers are likely to visit.

4.13 In December, we created a partnership pack filled with resources that our partners and other organisations could use to run their own registration drives. We have also produced infographics for use across social media platforms which target the home-mover and renter and young people audiences, as well as posters, web banners and web buttons with tailored messages for each group. Working with NUS and the Association of Colleges, we have also produced toolkits for use by student unions and colleges to help get students registered.

4.14 We will continue to support organisations working to promote registration and to look at what more both we and EROs at a local level can do with other organisations to further extend our reach into key target groups, such as young people, BME communities, students, home-movers and those living in private rented accommodation. As part of this, we will continue to issue fortnightly e-bulletins to our partners to share ideas and update them on the progress of our campaign.

The Commission's public awareness campaign

4.15 On 16 March, the Commission launched a national public awareness campaign which includes television, catch-up TV and online advertising. The objective of the campaign is to encourage people to register to vote ahead of the 20 April deadline. It will reach all adults, but with a focus on groups that our research has identified as being less likely to be registered to vote, such as students and young people, those who have recently moved home, people who rent their home, and people from some black and minority ethnic communities. This involves ensuring that our advert is shown on certain TV stations at specific times to capture our target audiences and that our digital advertising appears on a range of websites that are known to be accessed by members of these target groups. In addition, alongside our TV advert, we have broadcast an advert on Channel 4 using the cast and production style of their hit show Gogglebox. This is the biggest show on Channel 4 and will help us reach young people.

4.16 Our public awareness work also includes providing template resources and tools for EROs and ROs to use locally as part of their public engagement work, and using as many other media opportunities as we can to boost the message nationally.

4.17 To assess the performance of our campaign we will undertake independent tracking research before the start and towards the end of the campaign period. To measure the amount of additional entries on the electoral registers added during our campaign, we will compile data from completed applications and cross-reference this with data we will collect from EROs relating to the registers in force at the May 2015 election.

4.18 Taken together, the activity being carried out across the electoral community – by EROs, the Commission and many others – will go a long way towards helping to ensure that anyone who is not currently registered at the correct address takes the necessary action before the 20 April deadline so that they are able to participate in the May 2015 election.

5 After the May 2015 election: what happens next?

5.1 The registration deadline for the May 2015 election on 20 April is a key staging point in the transition to IER in Great Britain, and is vitally important for participation at the May election. It is not, however, the end of the process. This chapter sets out the key decisions and activities that will follow over the summer and autumn of 2015, and also considers further improvements that could be made to the registration system beyond the transition to IER.

Decision on ending the transition to IER

5.2 In June 2015, we will report again, this time on the state of the registers in force at the May 2015 elections and on progress with the transition to IER to that point. Our ability to conduct a comprehensive analysis and to be able to make a robust, evidence-based recommendation to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to make an Order to bring forward the end of the transition to IER to December 2015, will be dependent on Cabinet Office, EMS suppliers and in-house system developers taking urgent action to ensure we can base our analysis on reliable data.

5.3 Under the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013, the transition to IER is due to end in December 2016. At this point, any entries for electors who have not either been confirmed or successfully made an individual application to register to vote will be removed from the registers. However, the legislation also allows UK Ministers to make an Order (during a specified three-month period between June and August 2015) which would end the transition 12 months earlier, in December 2015.³⁵ A statutory instrument containing such an Order would not need to be debated by the UK Parliament, but could be annulled by a resolution of either House of Parliament.

5.4 In order to ensure our assessment is as up-to-date as possible we intend to collect local authority-level data from all EROs in Great Britain relating to the registers which are in force for the May 2015 elections.

5.5 We have highlighted earlier in this report the impact of current data quality limitations, and the resultant impact on our ability to analyse the December 2015 registers. We have also highlighted to the UK Government that any continuing data quality problems will present a significant risk to the ability of EROs, the Commission and the Government's Electoral Registration Transformation Programme to effectively monitor the transition to IER.

³⁵ Paragraph 28, Schedule 5 to the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013.

5.6 These data issues have created a significant risk that the Commission will not have sufficient information to be able to make a robust, evidence-based recommendation in June 2015 to inform the UK Government's decision on whether to recommend to the UK Parliament that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward.

5.7 Since the publication of our report in February the Cabinet Office have been working with us and the EMS suppliers in a different way in order to ensure that the data we plan to collect in May 2015 will be more accurate and reliable. In particular, there have been regular meetings to ensure that there is a clear and shared understanding of what each piece of requested data is intended to cover.

5.8 We will continue to work with the Cabinet Office, EMS suppliers and in-house system developers in order to make this happen. Without reliable data about electoral registration in June 2015, it is highly unlikely that the Commission would be able to recommend in any circumstances that the end of the transition to IER should be brought forward to December 2015.

5.9 If the data allows, our assessment will consider the potential impact of ending the transition to IER in December 2015. The Electoral Commission's goal is that electoral registers support and enable effective participation in elections and referendums by all those who want to take part. Elections to the Scottish Parliament are due to be held on 5 May 2016, along with a number of other polls across Great Britain.³⁶ The revised registers to be published in December 2015 will form the basis for the registers to be used for these polls in May 2016.

5.10 We also recognise, however, that electoral registers will continue to be used for other purposes, in particular determining the distribution and boundaries of parliamentary constituencies and other electoral areas. The registers published in December 2015 will be used as the basis for calculating the size of constituencies as part of the next scheduled UK Parliamentary boundary review. Our analysis of the registers in place for the May 2015 elections will therefore be of interest in that context - although this will not be its primary focus – and it is for governments and legislatures to consider how best to use electoral data in any future boundary revision exercises. Following its recent inquiry on the redrawing of UK Parliamentary boundaries the Political and Constitutional Reform Select Committee recommended that the Government consult the Boundary Commissions on the implications for the next review of bringing forward the end date for transitional arrangements. The Select Committee also recommended that the Commission includes information in our advice to UK Ministers and Parliament in our June 2015 report which would enable an assessment of the impact the transition to IER on the next boundary review.

5.11 Given the significance and potential impact of a decision to end the transition to IER a year earlier than currently provided for in legislation, our June 2015 report will

³⁶ The other scheduled polls to take place across Great Britain are: the National Assembly for Wales; the Mayor of London and London Assembly; Police and Crime Commissioners across England (except in London) and Wales; and local government elections in many areas of England.

consider not only the overall number of entries on the electoral registers, including how many of those are individually registered, but also any evidence about significant local geographic or demographic variations. Our aim will be to make a clear assessment of the effect on the registers of ending the transition in December 2015, and therefore removing entries for those electors not registered individually at that point.

Smith Commission's proposals

5.12 Following the referendum, the Smith Commission on further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament was established and presented its proposals, referred to as 'the Smith Commission Agreement', on 27 November 2014.³⁷ This proposed that the Scottish Parliament be given powers over how its members are elected, together with powers to extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, allowing them to vote in the 2016 Scottish Parliamentary elections. The Scottish Parliament would also be given additional powers in relation to the franchise for local government elections in Scotland.

5.13 Following the publication of the Smith Commission proposals the UK Government published a Command paper on 22 January. The draft clauses contained in the paper are intended to show how the measures included in the Smith Agreement would look in law. It is expected that the next UK Government will take the clauses forward in a Scotland Bill during the first session of the new UK Parliament.

5.14 Prior to the publication of the draft clauses on 22 January, an order was tabled in the UK and Scottish Parliaments on 20 January modifying the Scotland Act 1998: this order has now been passed, and as such transfers powers to the Scottish Parliament to enable it to extend the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in time for the 2016 Scottish Parliament election and the council elections scheduled for May 2017. The Scottish Government is now expected to introduce a franchise bill into the Scottish Parliament to enable this; the bill is expected to pass all stages in the Scottish Parliament by summer recess in late June 2015.

5.15 The Commission has discussed the provisions of the proposed bill with Scottish Government officials and will continue to work with them to ensure that the franchise is extended in a way that ensures 16 and 17 year olds can participate fully. We will also continue to work with EROs to ensure that their registration plans, including their wider public engagement strategy, reflect the additional work that will be involved to target information at those 16 and 17 year olds who will be eligible to vote.

Household canvass activity in 2015

³⁷ Report of the Smith Commission for further devolution of powers to the Scottish Parliament: <http://www.smith-commission.scot/smith-commission-report/>.

5.16 In the summer of 2015, EROs across Great Britain will be carrying out the annual canvass which, unlike in 2014/15, will involve sending HEFs to all properties.

5.17 As part of the canvass, any new potential electors identified by each ERO will be sent an invitation to register and a registration application form. If no response is received, EROs must take specified steps – including issuing two reminders and a personal visit - to follow up with any non-responders.

5.18 EROs' activity will also include a push to try to ensure that as many existing electors who are still not registered individually successfully complete an individual registration application.

5.19 Revised registers must be published by 1 December 2015 on conclusion of the canvass.³⁸

Measuring accuracy and completeness

5.20 In addition to the rolling programme of data collection, the Commission has also included two studies into the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers as part of our monitoring work around the transition to IER.

5.21 The result of the first of these studies was published in July 2014 and provides a baseline against which we can assess the impact of IER. This study found that the last registers to be compiled under household registration in Great Britain – those published in February/March 2014 – were 87% accurate and 85% complete. This represented a stabilisation in levels of completeness from the last point at which comparable registers were assessed (those published in December 2010).

5.22 The second study will take place once the transition to IER is complete using either the December 2015 or December 2016 registers, depending on when the transition ends. This will provide estimates on the accuracy and completeness of the first full IER registers, and will be published in either July 2016 or July 2017.

Beyond the transition to IER

5.23 The transition to an individual electoral registration system in Great Britain will mark a significant step in the transformation of electoral registration for the UK. It will mean that all entries on electoral registers in the UK will have been individually verified against another trusted data source. It will also mean that people in Great Britain can apply to register to vote or update their registration details online, bringing a more customer-focused service and approach to the electoral registration process.

5.24 The transformation of electoral registration should not stop at that point, however, and we will continue to explore options for further improving the electoral

³⁸ EROs are required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there is a by-election in their area during the period of the canvass (1 July – 1 December 2015), in which case the publication of the register can be postponed until up to 1 February 2016.

registration process across the UK. Others with an interest in ensuring accurate and complete electoral registers, including EROs, political parties and elected representatives, will also expect and seek further improvements to current processes. The UK Government will continue to be responsible for developing policy and legislation for electoral registration, and it will need to ensure that it retains the capacity to focus on and manage further change in the medium and long term. The UK and Scottish Governments will also need to work closely together to support any changes to the franchise for elections to the Scottish Parliament and for local government elections in Scotland, which will be matters for which the Scottish Parliament and Scottish Government are responsible following agreement to the Smith Commission proposals in late 2104.

5.25 Our research on the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in the UK has shown that there is nevertheless still significant scope for further improvements to the electoral registration process. We found that 14-15% of potentially eligible electors in Great Britain were not registered to vote at their current address in April 2014, and 27-29% of potentially eligible electors in Northern Ireland were not registered to vote at their current address in April 2012.

5.26 The confirmation matching process in Great Britain resulted in an overall match rate of 87% of entries (equivalent to 40.5 million register entries) being successfully matched and directly transferred to the new IER register without having to provide additional personal identifiers. In Scotland approximately 3.6 million electoral register entries were matched, which corresponds to 86% of the total number of records on the electoral registers sent for matching. While the primary function of confirmation has been to support the transition to IER, we believe that there may be scope to use similar confirmation matching processes to simplify the registration process beyond this initial stage. For example, matching information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass against data held by DWP could significantly reduce the number of people who need to provide their date of birth and National Insurance number in order for EROs to be able to verify their identity.

5.27 There is also potential to build 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. We will encourage and work with Governments and EROs to develop workable proposals for prompting people to register to vote or update their registration details at key points when they use other public services, such as applying for or receiving benefits or tax credits, changing their GP, applying for a driving license or renewing their passport. This will, however, depend heavily on securing a strong commitment within and between the UK and Scottish Governments to make the necessary changes to agency-wide processes, forms and websites.

5.28 The experience of using data to verify the identity of potential electors without requiring them to provide additional information also highlights the potential for direct registration to significantly improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers. For example, federal and state-level Electoral Commissions in Australia are already moving towards direct registration, using trusted information supplied by other government and public agencies to directly enrol electors or update their details on the electoral register. Electors are not required to complete a registration

application form, but an information notice is sent to their registered address setting out how to correct any errors.³⁹

5.29 While the data matching and data mining pilot schemes carried out by EROs in 2012 and 2013 have not yet successfully identified a workable model for using data from central government departments and agencies to identify potentially eligible electors, we will continue to support and encourage the UK Government to develop and test proposals for new tools, including using trusted local data, to help EROs meet their statutory duties.

5.30 UK Government Ministers also have powers to make an Order (subject to approval by the UK Parliament) to abolish the requirement for EROs to carry out an annual canvass of households. This would be a significant change to the model for electoral registration in Great Britain, and we would expect to see robust evidence of workable, effective alternative methods for capturing population movement before we would be comfortable endorsing any such change, particularly in light of the evidence contained in this report.

³⁹ See http://www.aec.gov.au/About_AEC/research/direct.htm for more information about direct registration in Australia.

Appendix A – EROs in Scotland⁴⁰

ERO	Local council area
Ayrshire Valuation Joint Board	East Ayrshire
	North Ayrshire
	South Ayrshire
Central Scotland Valuation Joint Board	Clackmannanshire
	Falkirk
	Stirling
Dumfries and Galloway Council	Dumfries and Galloway
Dunbartonshire and Argyll & Bute Valuation Joint Board	Argyll and Bute
	East Dunbartonshire
	West Dunbartonshire
Dundee City Council	Dundee City
Fife Council	Fife
Glasgow City Council	Glasgow City
Grampian Valuation Joint Board	Aberdeen City
	Aberdeenshire
	Moray
Highland and Western Isles Valuation Joint Board	Eilean Siar
	Highland
Lanarkshire Valuation Joint Board	North Lanarkshire
	South Lanarkshire
Lothian Valuation Joint Board	City of Edinburgh
	East Lothian
	Midlothian
	West Lothian
Orkney & Shetland Valuation Joint Board	Orkney Islands
	Shetland Islands
Renfrewshire Valuation Joint Board	East Renfrewshire
	Inverclyde
	Renfrewshire
Scottish Borders Council	Scottish Borders
Tayside Valuation Joint Board	Angus
	Perth and Kinross

⁴⁰ There are 15 EROs in Scotland – representing 32 council areas. Scottish councils may appoint either one of their officers, an officer of an adjoining council, or an officer appointed by a combination of councils to act as the ERO for the council. 10 EROs are appointed by groups of two, three or four councils, representing 27 of the 32 Scottish councils. The remaining five councils have appointed one of their own officers to act solely for their own area.