

The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain

Accuracy and completeness of the
registers in Great Britain and the
transition to Individual Electoral
Registration

July 2016

Translations and other formats

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Acknowledgements

This is the final report in the Commission's planned programme of research to monitor the introduction of individual electoral registration.

The Commission would like to thank those who have contributed to this research programme over the previous three years.

Electoral Registration Officers and their teams have provided data and other feedback to inform our research and analysis throughout the period. They have been supported by work undertaken by the Electoral Management Software (EMS) system suppliers.

The Commission would also like to thank colleagues at Cabinet Office for the work they have undertaken in funding the development of the EMS systems to allow for data collection and for their work in collating and analysing the information collected. In particular we are grateful to Hannah Kirk for her work and assistance.

We would also like to thank the research agencies which carried out the accuracy and completeness studies which bookend our monitoring programme. In particular, Martin Boon of ICM and Nick Moon and Chris Holmes of GfK.

Foreword

It is almost 15 years since the Electoral Commission called for the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Great Britain to help modernise our electoral system and make it more secure. It was provided for in legislation by the last Labour Government, with the law then updated by the Coalition Government before provision was made to bring the transition to the new system to an end by the current Government last year.

This report marks the end of a significant journey of reform. It is important, however, that another is now started.

This report, our last on the transition to IER, shows that in headline terms between 10 June 2014 and 1 December 2015, the overall accuracy of the local government registers increased by four percentage points, whilst their completeness appears to have declined by less than one percentage point.

This means that, in December 2015, around 8 million people were not correctly registered at their current address. This is too many.

However, this snapshot excludes the registrations that took place in the build up to the May 2016 elections and the EU referendum which show that people find it quick and easy to register before a poll when they most need to be registered. Indeed, our report sets out evidence indicating that, compared to household registration, under IER people are increasingly likely to register to vote in the run-up to an electoral event compared to other points during the year.

This small decline in the headline level of completeness masks some specific problems that our report has identified following the transition to IER that require urgent attention, perhaps the most significant of which are the significant drops in completeness among younger age groups. This includes a drop of approximately nine percentage points among 18-19 year olds and socio-demographic groups more associated with the young such as private renters, where there has been a six percentage point drop in registration levels.

The future

As we look to the future, there are some concrete actions that governments can take to help make our registration system stronger, and keep it in step with modern technology. Firstly, Ministers should explore how the online system can be upgraded across the UK so that people can check whether they are registered. This is particularly important as it would reduce the impact of significant numbers of duplicate applications that Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) have to process, freeing up more of their time to focus on the under-registered groups in their area.

Secondly, it is time to move away from a system which relies wholly on electors taking steps to register themselves. More automatic or direct

enrolment processes should now be developed. We welcome the Government's commitments to conduct pilots to support streamlining the annual canvass to reduce costs for EROs, but we recommend in this report that the Government should also develop a programme of feasibility studies to examine in more detail how further modernisation could be delivered. Initial priorities should include automatic registration for 16 and 17 year olds at the time they receive their National Insurance number, and a focus on ways to ensure that electors do not drop off the register when they move home, as too many do at present.

We also welcome the work currently being undertaken to introduce online registration for electors in Northern Ireland.

The Commission is currently conducting a strategic review of our future priorities and I hope that a key part of this will include developing a programme of work to support a new Government strategy that sits above the pilots it is currently exploring to continue the modernisation of our electoral system.

This strategy should be underpinned by a new electoral law framework based on the recommendations of the Law Commissions. It should also include a response to the good work done by others, for example, the cross party All Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation, which has recently made a number of constructive recommendations for change that should be explored.

It was undoubtedly right to move to a system of individual electoral registration, but we cannot wait more than a decade for the next phase of change to be delivered. This would mean failing a generation of voters over at least two more UK General Election cycles. There is appetite for a modern electoral register among EROs, civil society groups, and among electors themselves – and I hope that the government will embrace it.

Finally, I would like to pay tribute to the efforts of the successive Governments mentioned in drafting and passing the legislation that has provided the framework for reform and, in particular, the civil service team that designed and delivered the online registration system implemented alongside IER.

As I approach the end of my 8 year term as Chair, which has largely run alongside the timetable for the delivery of IER, I'd also like to thank the Electoral Commission's staff, past and present. A significant amount of work has gone into supporting its delivery, from challenging and advising Governments in the early days to providing guidance for, and oversight of, the work of EROs as it was implemented.

But none of this change would have happened without the sheer hard work of EROs and their teams across the country. They have delivered IER between busy European Parliamentary Elections and a UK Parliamentary General Election - and for our Scottish colleagues, of course, the independence referendum.

This is the most significant change in electoral administration since the Equal Franchise Act in 1928 delivered universal suffrage. The fact that it has gone unnoticed by most voters is due to their hard work in making it a smooth transition and they deserve our thanks.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Jenny Watson". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Jenny Watson
Chair, Electoral Commission
July 2016

Executive summary

Background

Between June and September 2014, a new system of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was introduced. The transition to IER was completed in December 2015.

The change was an important improvement in how people register to vote, reforming a system that remained largely unchanged since the Victorian period, making it more modern and secure.

The Commission set out a programme of research to monitor the transition to IER and this is the final report of this programme. It presents the findings from our study on the accuracy and completeness of the registers published in December 2015 at the end of the transition.

These findings are compared against the ones on the February/March 2014 registers, the last revised registers published before the transition to IER began.

From household to individual registration

The move to IER was a necessary step towards a more modern and secure system. The old household registration system was based on the 'head of the household' completing registration forms on behalf of all other members of each household, an outdated concept in the structure of today's society and one which was not designed to enable individuals to manage and maintain their own personal registration.

The previous system was also vulnerable to fraud as there was no requirement to provide any evidence of an individual's identity to register to vote and no systematic mechanism for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to verify the identity of applicants.

Electoral registration in Great Britain remains an 'Enumeration system' with a new register prepared annually (and reviewed most months), partly compiled via house-to-house canvassing. However, IER introduced a number of major changes to the system. The main ones are:

- **Personal identifiers and verification:** IER requires applicants to provide their National Insurance Number (NINo) and Date of Birth (DOB) in addition to their name and address. This information is then verified against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database or locally held data. This is an important measure that makes the system less vulnerable to fraud.

- **Online registration:** people can now apply to register online, an important step in modernising the system and making it quick and easy to access.
- **Two-stage canvassing approach:** EROs are still required to conduct a full household annual canvass but under IER this requires two forms, one for the household and one for each resident within the household (if they are not already registered).

The new system also brought about other important changes to the registration system, such as the process for deleting entries.

The electoral register is a record of names and addresses of people eligible to vote in elections and referendums. The register is the lynchpin of the voting process and it provides the list of those eligible to take part in elections and referendums.

The registers are also used for other public purposes such as boundary reviews, jury service, law enforcement, credit rating and marketing.

Defining accuracy and completeness

The quality of the registers is considered in two main ways: their accuracy and their completeness.

By **accuracy** we mean that *'there are no false entries on the electoral registers'*. Accuracy is therefore the measure of the percentage of entries on the registers which relate to verified and eligible voters who are resident at that address. Inaccurate register entries may relate to entries which have become redundant (for example, due to home movement), which are ineligible and have been included unintentionally, or which are fraudulent.

By **completeness**, we mean that *'every person who is entitled to have an entry on an electoral register is registered'*. Completeness refers to the percentage of eligible people who are registered at their current address. The proportion of eligible people who are not included on the register at their current address constitutes the rate of under-registration.

Methodology

There are two main methods used to assess the quality of the electoral registers: one uses census data, the other one house-to-house survey data.

The methodology used for this study is based on the latter method, a house-to-house survey of 6,027 addresses, across 116 local authorities, conducted by trained interviewers with the aim of gathering information from residents which could then be checked against the details held on the registers.

The methodology was built on previous studies conducted by the Commission and has been validated by the findings from a study using census data which are presented in our report *Electoral registration in 2011*.

In July 2014 we published *'The quality of 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain'* which assessed the accuracy and completeness of the last registers produced under the household registration system. This report is used as the main point of comparison throughout this report.

Our future research programme

This report marks the end of our research programme to monitor the transition to IER. All our studies on electoral registration are available on our website together with most of the data collected during the transition.

For future studies we intend to use the registers published in May, close to a set of polls. Currently, the next study on accuracy and completeness is planned for the May 2018 registers in order to provide an assessment well ahead of the next UK parliamentary general election, currently scheduled for 2020.

Headline findings

Data collected from our house-to-house survey, checked against the December 2015 registers indicates that overall:

- the local government registers were 91% accurate and 84% complete
- the parliamentary registers were 91% accurate and 85% complete;

This means that during the transition to IER - 10 June 2014 to 1 December 2015 – the overall accuracy of the registers increased (by an estimated four percentage points). Completeness appears to have remained largely stable with a decline of less than 1 percentage point which is not statistically significant.

However there have been statistically significant drops in completeness among younger age groups and socio-demographic groups more associated with the young such as private renters and recent home movers.

These specific decreases suggest that there is likely to have been a genuine decline at the headline level.

These estimates are for Great Britain as a whole; the accuracy and completeness of the registers is expected to vary considerably across local authority areas due to the demographics of the local population as well as registration practices.

The sample size for this study allows us to report separately for England, Wales and Scotland:

- In England, the registers were found to be 90% accurate (both parliamentary and local government); 85 and 84% complete (parliamentary and local government respectively);
- In Wales, the registers were more accurate than in Great Britain as a whole (93% both registers) while the parliamentary and local government registers were 85% and 84% complete respectively;

- Scotland’s registers were 91% accurate; 86% (parliamentary) and 85% (local government) complete.

Table ES.1: Accuracy and completeness of the register before and after the introduction of IER in Great Britain.

Quality indicator	Register	Pre-transition: Feb/Mar 2014	Post-transition: December 2015
Accuracy	Parliamentary	86%	91%
	Local government	87%	91%
Completeness	Parliamentary	86%	85%
	Local government	85%	84%

These findings relate to December 2015 registers, which were published at the end of the autumn 2015 canvass and the end of the transition to IER. These registers contained 3% fewer entries than the registers used for the May 2015 UK Parliamentary general elections, and they also predate the changes to the registers made in the run up to the May 2016 elections and the referendum on EU membership held in June 2016. The electorate increased in size by approximately 4-5% during this period. The fluctuation in total number of register entries is represented in Figure ES1 below.

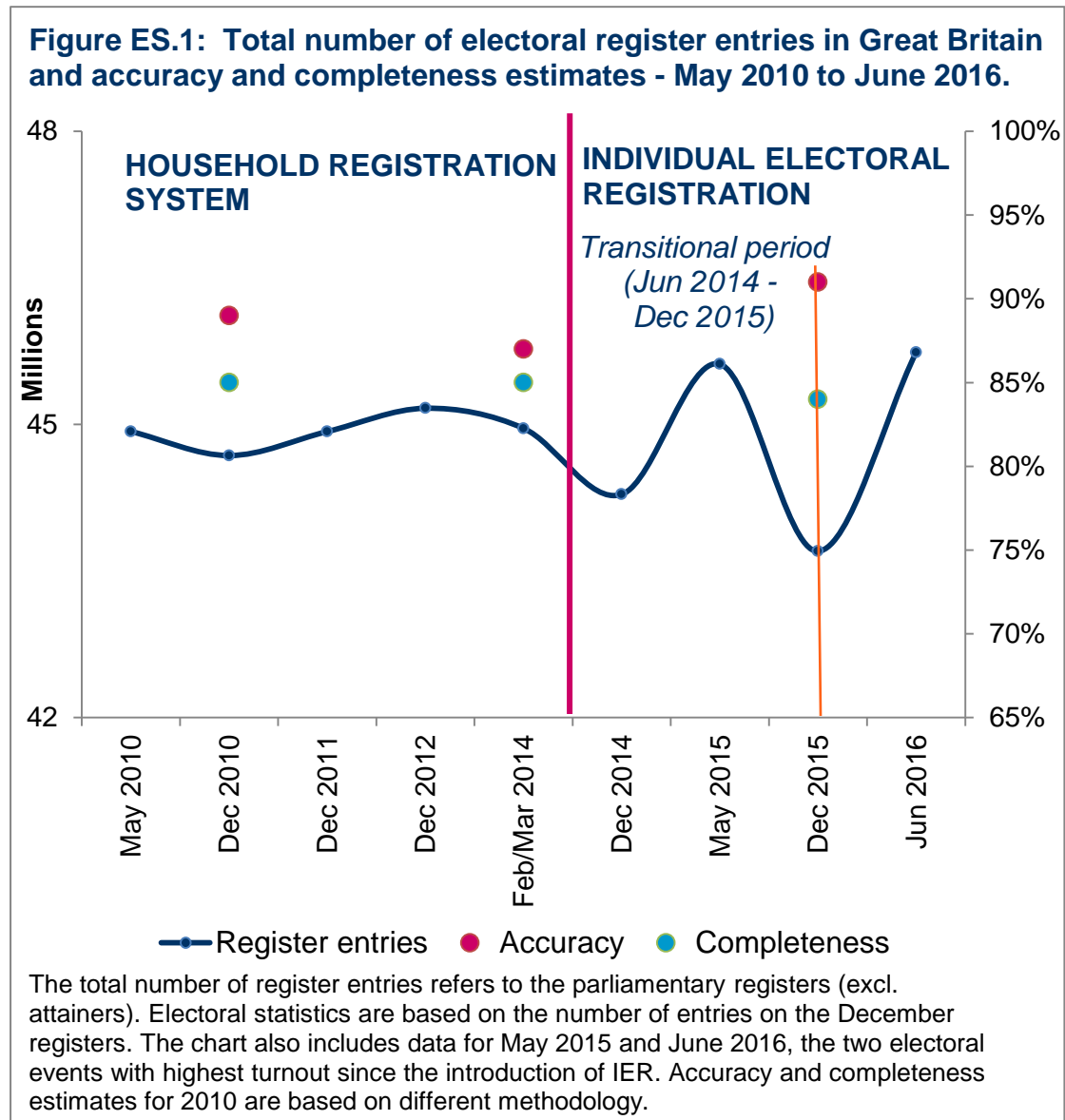
The findings from this accuracy and completeness study suggest that most, but not all, of the entries removed at the end of the transition to IER in December 2015 were inaccurate. This partly explains why accuracy has improved while levels of completeness have remained largely stable (although not all of the improvement in accuracy can be attributed to the removal of entries at the end of the transition).¹

Parliament chose to bring the end of the transition (and hence the deletion of these entries) forward from December 2016 to December 2015. At the time the Commission recommended that the end of the transition should not be brought forward as we had no data on which to judge the nature of the entries that would be removed. In the absence of data we also saw a risk that removing the entries, ahead of the planned May 2016 polls, would put the

¹ Any entry which had not either been successfully matched against DWP data or had personal identifiers provided and verified was removed at the end of the transitional period.

onus on individual voters to need to re-register rather than on EROs to check their accuracy of these entries.

These accuracy and completeness findings suggest that there was no notable effect on the completeness of the registers from the removal of these entries and that the main impact is likely to have been the improvement in accuracy.



Completeness

The study found that the overall completeness of the December 2015 registers at the end of the transition was **84% (local government register) and 85% (parliamentary)**. As these findings relate to the registers in December 2015 they do not include the increases in the registers in the period before the May 2016 elections and the referendum on EU membership.

The figures mean that, following a significant drop in completeness between 2001 and 2011 (approximately -6/7%) and the stabilisation between 2011 and

2014, completeness appears to have remained largely stable, with a decline of less than one percentage point, between the introduction of IER (June 2014) and the end of the transitional period on 1 December 2015.

However, while this is a relatively small change at the overall level, there are more notable decreases for particular socio-economic groups as set out below. This research also confirms the correlation between certain demographics and lower or higher level of completeness with **age and mobility still found to be the variables with the strongest impact**: the young and those more likely to move home are less likely to be registered.

As with previous studies, we found a strong relationship between completeness and turnout: the demographic groups associated with higher population mobility and under registration are also the ones less likely to vote.

All figures presented below are for the local government registers and where differences are noted, they are statistically significant.²

Socio-demographic variation

The study found that the main drivers of lower levels of completeness remain age (young people 18-34 are less likely to be registered), recent home movement and whether someone rents their home. These factors are largely responsible for the other variations by socio-demographic group set out below.

- **Length of residence**: people who had lived at their address for up to a year, or between one and two years, were significantly less likely to be registered (27% and 69% completeness) than those who had lived at an address for longer. The level of completeness for these groups had also dropped since 2014 when they were 40% and 77% respectively.
- **Age**: there has been a decline in completeness among people aged under 45 with the biggest drop recorded for 18-19 year olds (65%, down nine percentage points since 2014).³ The findings indicate that there has been a decline in completeness among attainers.⁴ Although this is not statistically significant (due to a small sample) the accompanying decrease in the absolute numbers of attainers registered suggests it is real.
- **Gender**: as in the past, women are more likely to be registered than men (85% vs. 83% respectively).

² There are no notable differences between the two registers in terms of patterns of registration by socio-demographics.

³ Although this decline is statistically significant it is important to note that the figures are subject to relatively large margins of error due to the small sample size. The true decline for this age group could be notably smaller or larger than nine percentage points.

⁴ Attainers are 16 and 17 year olds who will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

- **Nationality:** European Union (53%) and Commonwealth citizens (61%) are significantly less likely to be registered than UK and Irish citizens (86%). This pattern is consistent with pre-IER estimates.
- **Ethnicity:** there has been a drop in completeness among people who give their ethnicity as white (from 86% in 2014 to 85% in 2015) but they are still the ethnic group most likely to be registered. Changes among other ethnic groups are not statistically significant.
- **Disability:** in line with 2014, people with a physical disability are more likely to be registered (90%) than those without (83%) while those with a mental disability are less likely (76%).
- **Socio-economic group:** in line with the 2014 findings, completeness among people in social class ABs (88%) and C2s (86%) is higher than among C1s and DEs (83% and 80% respectively). Social group C1 returned a statistically significant drop in completeness from 2014 (down two percentage points).
- **Tenure:** homeowners were found again to be more likely to be registered than private renters. Comparison with 2014 shows an increase in completeness among those who own their property outright (from 94% to 95%) and a decrease among private renters (63% to 57%).
- **Highest qualification:** highest levels of completeness are recorded among those with no qualification and those with a degree (both 87%) and the lowest among people with A-levels/Highers (80%). Completeness among the latter group was lower than in 2014 (down four percentage points).
- **Number of adults in the household:** the pattern remained consistent pre/post-transition with two-person households returning the highest level of completeness (85%).

Attitudes towards registration and voting

We previously argued that mobility alone cannot account for the lower level of registration of people more likely to move home such as young people, renters and people in social class DE.

Low levels of completeness among these groups, especially young people, are strongly linked to voting. As part of our survey, we asked respondents about their views on electoral registration and voting. The figures below are for respondents only and therefore are not nationally representative.

- **Electoral registration:** as observed in our 2014 study, there is a clear correlation between completeness and attitude towards electoral registration. Those who feel they have a duty to register to vote are far more likely to be registered than those who think it is not worth it (89% against 66%). Compared with 2014, registration among those in the latter group decreased by 8%. We also find a statistically significant drop among those who think that 'people should only register if they care who wins an election' (down from 85% in 2014 to 78% in 2015), a view mainly expressed by people in younger age groups.
- **Voting:** similarly, those who feel it is not worth voting are less likely to be registered (71%) than those who see it as a duty (89%). There has been a significant drop among those who think that 'people should only vote if

they care who wins', down from 87% in 2014 to 80% in 2015. Again, people under 34s were more likely to express this view.

- **Voting at the 2015 general election:** Those who claimed to have voted in 2015 (92%) were significantly more likely to be registered than those who claimed not to have (69%). Again, the likelihood of voting increases with age.

The findings from this research indicate a decrease in completeness for certain groups including younger people, private renters and recent home movers. **However, evidence such as additions in the build-up to the 2015 UK general election and applications to register received between December and May/June 2016, suggests that completeness (overall and for specific groups) was likely to be higher in May 2015 and again in May/June 2016.** Those groups with lower levels of completeness, especially among young people and those with higher mobility, appear to be more likely to register in the run up to an electoral event than at any other time during the year.

The survey was designed to generate percentage estimates, not to quantify the number of eligible individuals not correctly registered. However, using the completeness estimates as a starting point, **we calculate that between 7.8 and 8.3 million people were not correctly registered in December 2015.** Our previous estimate for people not correctly registered was 7.5 million although expressed as a range it was 7.2 – 8 million. Completeness appears to have remained largely stable since 2014. The difference between the two ranges is due to a combination of the less than one percentage point decline and population growth over the intervening two years.

Accuracy

Both local government and parliamentary registers were found to be 91% accurate in December 2015. This represents a notable increase since before the introduction of IER of four percentage points.

The most common 'major error' continues to relate to register entries that refer to individuals that no longer live at the property (8.8% of all entries).⁵ There has been however a decline in this type of error which accounts for much of the overall improvement in accuracy.

Table ES.2 below presents the type of errors found on the local government registers before and after the IER transition. Levels of accuracy for the parliamentary registers are similar.

⁵ We classify as 'major errors' those for redundant entries (people who moved home), those that may prevent an individual casting their vote at a polling station (e.g.: wrong surname) or those that would allow someone ineligible to vote (e.g.: incorrect date of birth for someone under 18). 'Minor errors' are those which would not prevent someone from casting their vote such as an entry with a spelling error.

Table ES.2: Types of error on the February/March 2014 and December 2015 local government registers.⁶

	Feb/March 2014	December 2015
Major errors total	13.5%	9.4%
Major errors – (a)		
No corresponding name taken at address	11.3%	8.8%
Major errors – (b)	1.6%	0.3%
First name and/or surname wrong on register	1.2%	0.1%
First name and/or surname missing on register	0.1%	-
UK/Irish/Commonwealth marker present ⁷	0.3%	0.2%
Major errors – (c)	0.6%	0.3%
Name on register corresponds to ineligible name on survey	-	0.1%
Attainers - DOB missing or wrong	0.1%	0.1%
EU citizens marker missing	0.5%	0.1%
Accurate with minor errors	10.7%	10.4%
First name/surname on register misspelled	2.2%	1.0%
First name/surname on register incomplete	0.6%	0.5%
Middle name missing from register	7.9%	7.8%
Middle name initials misspelled or incomplete on register	0.0%	0.1%
Middle name initial wrong on register	N/A ⁸	0.1%
Person does not have a middle name but middle name on registers (respondents only)	N/A	0.2%
Surname is/assumed to be previous surname ⁹	N/A	0.5%
First/middle/surname in different order on register	N/A	0.1%
DoB earlier on register for attainer ¹⁰	N/A	0.0%

⁶ The categorisation of major and minor errors is the same on the parliamentary register – although some proportions differ

⁷ These electors should not have a marker.

⁸ These categories were not recorded in the 2014 study.

⁹ This assumption was made if an individual's first name matched and the surname they had given matched that of other members of their household but not the surname on the electoral register.

¹⁰ Where the date of birth on the register is earlier than the attainer's actual birthday. In this case they would technically be able to vote in an election before they are eligible.

As the majority of errors are for individuals no longer resident at the address, it is not possible to collect demographic information about this group and the analysis we can conduct is limited.

These findings indicate that during the transition, the number of entries decreased as a result of EROs deleting inaccurate entries. Overall, evidence suggests that during the transition to IER, accuracy was at its highest (during the transition to IER) in December 2015, at the end of the autumn canvass which generated the majority of deletions in 2015 (compared to the rest of the year) and following the removal of the 800,000 entries which had been retained during the transition as part of the transitional arrangements.

These estimates allow us to approximate the total number of inaccurate entries on the December 2015 registers: between 4 to 4.5 million on the local government registers.

The future of electoral registration

Overall, the results from the accuracy and completeness study indicate that the transition to IER was managed well with a notable increase in accuracy and largely stable levels of completeness.

Under-registration in December appears to have increased among some of those groups that were already less likely to be registered under the old system - young people and especially attainers – but data indicates completeness was likely to be higher in May 2015 and May/June 2016.

In addition, other evidence collected during the transition period – data and feedback from EROs – indicates that there are issues and challenges inherent in the system of electoral registration, raising the question of whether the current system is sustainable in the longer term. Our analysis in this report suggests that it is not, particularly when some of the other uses of the registers are considered, for two broad (and related) reasons.

- Firstly, some of the IER provisions have reduced the efficiency of the traditional canvass.
- Secondly, while we have always found a strong link between attitude towards registration and attitude to voting, there is evidence that this attitude is now more reflected in individuals' behaviour and the way (and time at which) they register.

IER and the annual canvass

During 2015, the overall level of changes on the registers throughout the year was the same as a typical pre-IER year (the level of additions and deletions

made in 2013 and 2015 are identical).¹¹ However, while under the household system most changes occurred during the autumn canvass (80% of both additions and deletions), in 2015 most additions were made between January and June, outside the autumn canvass period (60% against 20% under the old system).

One factor that may explain this is the introduction, under IER, of a **two-stage canvass approach**: EROs have to send a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) to all properties in their area every year. When the returned form contains a new name, a potential unregistered elector, another form is sent out: the Invitation to Register (ITR). This asks the individual to make an application for registration, which requires them to provide their NINo and DoB. Individuals can also respond to ITRs by completing a registration application online.

These changes have made the annual canvass more complex because of the requirement to pursue HEFs and ITRs and EROs continue to be required to canvass all households in their areas when, based on data from the 2011 census, on average 88% of residents do not move home during the year.

The 2015 canvass – the first full one conducted under IER – recorded a significantly lower response rate for the HEF compared to the old household canvass form (81% against 93%). The ITR response rate is even lower (42%) but it does not include online submissions and so it is not possible to tell what the true level of response was. The lower response rate to the HEF may be partly caused by the fact that the form appears to be longer than the old canvass form (although the amount of information required from electors is similar).

Although we cannot judge the overall response rate for the ITR, feedback from EROs indicates that they feel they have had to work harder and expend greater resources to achieve a response from electors. This may be in part due to the two-stage canvassing approach with anecdotal evidence indicating that some people believed that by returning the HEF they were registering, leading them to ignore the subsequent ITR.

Some EROs also did not complete their canvassing activities ahead of the publication of the registers in December 2015. This was entirely legal and was in most cases a response to some specific challenges posed by IER such as beginning to contact students when their term begins. This allowed EROs with a high concentration of young and mobile people to wait until residents have settled following a change of address (generally during summer and early autumn, particularly for students) before contacting certain households.

If this approach continues, which seems likely, it undermines the previously accepted nature of the 1 December registers as the fully revised, most

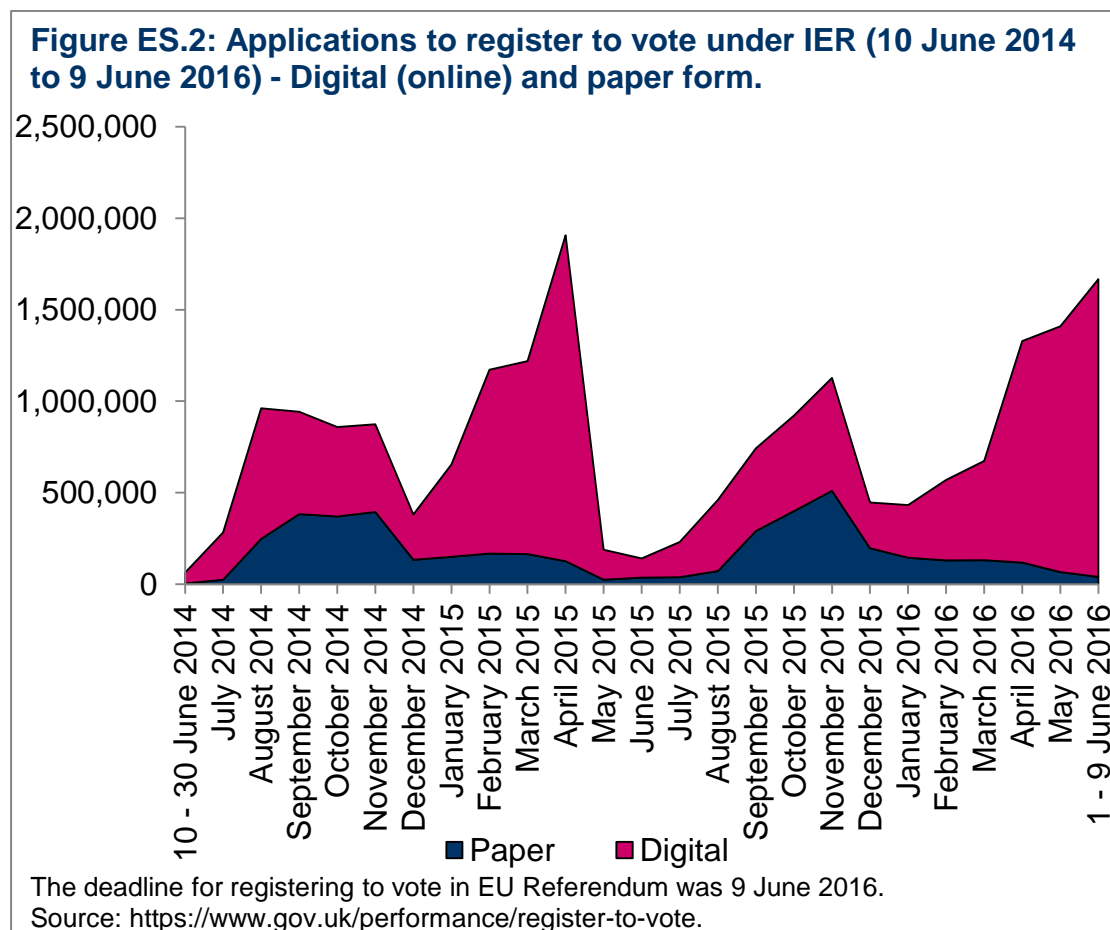
¹¹ The 2013 autumn canvass was postponed to facilitate the start of the transition to IER (Confirmation Live Run process) and conducted between end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. The registers were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Scotland and Wales).

accurate and complete, registers each year. In addition to this there appear to be other changes related to the timing of significant registration activity which also call the significance attached to 1 December into question.

Registering, voting and completeness

At the same time as it appears to have become more challenging to efficiently and effectively canvass properties within the traditional canvass period, we have also seen other changes. The **introduction of online registration** has made applying to register to vote easier and more convenient at any point during the year (78% of all applications submitted under IER were made online). The immediacy of the system, where an application can be completed in five minutes, also makes it easier to directly encourage people to register to vote through public awareness campaigns centred around major polls. In 2015, 60% of all additions were made outside the canvass period and 25% in the five weeks before the general elections alone.

As Figure ES.2 below shows there was a substantial number of applications and a significant, albeit smaller, number of additions to the registers at the time of the polls in 2015 and 2016. People can register easily and quickly when they want to. Notably, in the run up to the May 2015 elections, 58% of all applications were made by the under-35s.



As Figure ES1 has already shown, this pattern in applications is also seen in fluctuations in the number of register entries. This fluctuation was even more marked at the local authority level as the table below shows for a selected number of local areas.

Table ES.3: Variations in electoral register entries – December 2014 to June 2016.

Local authority	Percentage change in electorate from previous point			
	December 2014	May 2015	December 2015	June 2016
Oxford	-11%	+9%	-11%	+10%
Southampton	-10%	+5%	-8%	+4%
Liverpool	-6%	+5%	-4%	+5%
Ceredigion	-12%	+6%	-4%	+9%
Great Britain	-2%	+3%	-4%	+5%

This is not particularly surprising as electorates have historically fluctuated both year on year and within years, but not to this extent.

While we have always found a strong link between attitude towards registration and attitude to voting - with voters much more likely to be registered than non-voters or those who don't see voting as a duty - some of the findings from this study suggest an **increasingly closer link between registering and voting**, with, for example, a drop in completeness among those who think that 'people should only register if they care who wins an election' (down from 85% in 2014 to 78% in 2015).

This is logical given the principle of individual ownership of registration under IER: if you are not interested in voting, you are less likely to register and under IER no-one else can do it for you. The latter point suggests a closer relationship between people's attitude and their behaviour (or rather the outcome of their behaviour – where if they do not act, they do not become registered).

The implications of this pattern are reflected in the findings on completeness; under IER those who are less likely to vote are even less likely to be registered than they were under the household system. It is the same pattern of under-registration but more pronounced.

At the same time, the ease of online registration (and its particular appeal to younger under registered age groups) helps facilitate registering ahead of a poll that engages them. As a result, those who are more likely to move home present a lower level of completeness in December when they are not motivated to register.

Our analysis of all this data, coupled with the findings of the completeness and accuracy study, strongly suggest that, although we cannot quantify it,

completeness was higher in both May 2015 and June 2016 than it was in December 2015.

Implications

Currently, household canvassing activity remains a key method in maintaining accurate and complete registers. However, given the analysis above, while the first full IER canvass appears to have delivered a reasonable level of completeness and improved accuracy these findings need to be seen in the wider context in which the canvass took place.

Firstly, the May 2015 election had helped to encourage registration and to create registers with high levels of completeness at the start of the canvass. Secondly, as part of the IER transition, Government had made additional funding available to EROs to support the delivery of IER. This will not be available on a permanent basis and local authority budgets are already stretched with little prospect of them making up any shortfall when Government funding is withdrawn.

While the availability of online registration appears to offer a tool which is effective in allowing people to register and participate in elections, the new system of individual registration remains untested outside of years with high turnout elections or referendums. **Our analysis suggest that, without a high profile poll and with a more complex canvass and reducing resources, it is unlikely that the current electoral registration system can continue to deliver accurate registers or maintain (or improve) their completeness in the longer term.**

In addition, even when a significant election or referendum takes place, the changes outlined above raise a question about the continued usefulness of the 1 December register publication date for both electoral statistics and boundary reviews.

Below we set out our recommendations for addressing the issues raised above.

Recommendations

Action in the short term

Sharing what works

We know that EROs already deliver a range of activities during and outside of the canvass period designed to improve accuracy and completeness, particularly focussing on those groups in their areas that are likely to be under-registered. We need to better understand the impact of these activities, so that EROs can learn from the experiences of others facing similar challenges and develop strategies for addressing under-registration in their own areas.

We will work with EROs during the 2016 canvass period to collect evidence of the impact of specific examples of practices used to improve accuracy and completeness with those groups who are more likely to be under-registered. We will share the outcomes with other EROs so that they can adopt in their own local area strategies that have already proved to be successful.

Pilots

We have highlighted above concerns around the efficiency of the canvass and the resources required to run it. Government has recognised the need to explore improvements to the mechanics and processes involved in registration now that the transition to IER has been delivered. Pilots will be run during the 2016 canvass to explore the impact of amending the current requirements on EROs, e.g. by removing stages from the canvass and/or allowing greater use of data.

We support the aims of these pilots and will publish our evaluation of them in 2017. A further set of pilots is also being planned for the 2017 canvass. While the results of these schemes may indicate some changes that can be made to improve the efficiency of the canvass, this is not the kind of radical change that could significantly improve levels of accuracy and completeness.

The future: a modern electoral register

As a result of the challenges outlined above, including reductions in local authority budgets and new statutory requirements for EROs, we believe that significant change and modernisation will be necessary to meet the new challenges of maintaining accurate and complete electoral registers.

Our vision of a modern electoral register is one which:

- Uses trusted available public data to keep itself accurate and complete throughout the year without relying solely on action by individuals; and
- Makes it as easy as possible for electors to ensure their own registration record is accurate and complete, particularly ahead of elections and referendums.

Several countries have already implemented forms of automatic or direct electoral registration to help meet challenges similar to those now facing EROs in Great Britain, including Australia, Canada and various US states. These systems enable those with responsibility for maintaining the electoral register to register electors directly using reliable and trusted information from other public sources, or to update their details when they move without the elector having to “re-register” at their new address.

We believe it is time to move away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead develop automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently than current resource intensive canvass processes.

As a first step, we think it would be most useful for the Government to begin a programme of feasibility studies to examine in more detail how future changes could be delivered, including the administrative, legal, infrastructure and financial implications of new ways of managing electoral registers in the UK.

The Commission is currently undertaking a strategic review of its future work and focus, the outcome of which we will publish. We hope our future plans will be in support of a Government programme of activity that responds to the recommendations we have made in this and other recent reports where we have set out some ambitious but essential policy options to ensure our electoral system remains secure and fit for purpose in an increasingly technological age.

Developing any form of automated registration will require detailed planning however there are a number of obvious areas where work could begin. These include:

- **Automatic registration of 16- and 17-year-old attainers:** currently, NINOs are allocated automatically just before eligible people turn 16, and a letter containing details of the NINO are sent to individuals at the address held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. This information could be shared with EROs, enabling 16 year olds who have been issued with a NINO to be added to electoral registers as attainers (who are not able to vote in elections until they are 18, other than in Scotland for Scottish Parliament and local government elections), provided that the ERO is satisfied that the individual is eligible and meets the residence requirements for registration.
- **Updating home-movers' details:** The majority of home-movers move within the same local authority area (59% in 2011), which suggests that there may be potential for EROs to be able to use trusted sources of local or national data to identify where there are changes (or no changes) required to the register. People will interact with a wide range of services when they move home in order to update their address details. This update could be used by the ERO to change the details on the register without requiring electors to provide their personal identifiers again. This would be a limited form of automatic registration but it may be possible to implement this approach sooner and possibly learn lessons for a fuller system.
- **Confirmation matching:** The experience of confirmation matching during the transition to IER in Great Britain also highlights the potential to simplify the process by which electors' identities are verified before being added to the register. The extent to which information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass could be matched against data held by the Department for Work and Pensions should be explored in more detail. This could mean that fewer people would be required to provide their NINO in order to register to vote. Confirmation matching would also help EROs improve accuracy by providing a further source of evidence about whether individual register entries relate to people who are still resident at addresses.

- **Verifying nationality:** While EROs currently have powers to require applicants to provide evidence of their nationality before determining their registration application, this is largely carried out on an exceptions basis where there are clear grounds to indicate that the applicant may not be entitled to be registered (or only entitled to be included in the register of local government electors). The security and accuracy of electoral registers would be further improved if nationality checks were automatically built into the application process, for example by comparing applications against nationality data held as part of the DWP Customer Information System.
- **Identifying and removing duplicate register entries:** the dispersed nature of the electoral registers across Great Britain currently means that it is not possible to identify duplicate entries between registers which are managed by different EROs. Providing a mechanism for EROs to compare information about electoral register entries across all 380 registers would help to further improve the accuracy of electoral registers.

Tools for EROs and electors

Findings from this study as well as wider experiences from the IER transition and recent polls suggest that additional tools could be provided to assist EROs in maintaining the registers:

- **Managing registration details online:** We estimate that a significant number of the applications made during the five weeks before elections (in 2015 and 2016) were duplicates. Providing a way for electors to check their registration status at the beginning of the online registration application process would reduce the action required by voters to keep their register entry up to date, and would also reduce the impact on EROs of processing duplicate applications

Any work undertaken to develop either one of these ideas or a full system of automatic registration should be done on the understanding that the system will need to be flexible enough to manage other ideas that are not currently being taken forward. For example, the Commission believes that, while it may not be an immediate priority, **the ability to register on the day of an election** may be beneficial in the future. The options for this should not be reduced because it is curtailed by new systems developed in the short to medium term.

Finally, **we recommend that Parliament should consider** whether it would be more appropriate in future (ahead of the next scheduled review of UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries which will use the December 2020 registers) to base constituency and boundary reviews on electorate data taken from the registers used for elections instead.

1 Introduction

1.1 The system of electoral registration in Great Britain has changed. Between June and September 2014, a new system called Individual Electoral Registration (IER) has been introduced.¹² The transition to IER was completed in December 2015. The change was an important improvement in how people register to vote, reforming a system that remained largely unchanged since the Victorian period by making it more modern and secure.

1.2 The transition from the old to the new system presented challenges and risks and had to be managed carefully: our last national study on the quality of the registers published before the start of the transition (February/March 2014) found that 15% of eligible individuals were not correctly registered and 13% of entries were inaccurate.

1.3 The Commission set out its plan to monitor the transition to IER through the period and has reported at each key stage of the process. This is the final report of our planned programme of research to monitor the transition to IER and sets out the findings from our study into the accuracy and completeness of the registers published at the end of the transition to the new system (December 2015).¹³

1.4 The accuracy and completeness findings from this report are compared against our study on the accuracy and the completeness of the registers conducted on the last revised registers published before the introduction of IER (February/March 2014).

1.5 The report also presents evidence from historic research and data collected during the transition to IER. In doing so, this study provides an assessment of the impact of the transition on the quality of the registers as well as an evaluation of the provisions introduced by IER during this period.

The electoral register

1.6 The electoral register is a record of names and addresses of people eligible to vote in elections and referendums. The register is the foundation of the voting process: it provides the list of those who are eligible to vote and those not included on the register cannot take part in elections and referendums

1.7 The registers are also used for other public purposes such as:

¹² Northern Ireland has had a system of individual electoral registration in place since 2002.

¹³ All our reports on progress with the transition to Individual Electoral Registration are available on our website: <http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/our-work/our-research/electoral-registration-research>.

- **Boundary reviews:** the Boundary Commissions use the registers to calculate electoral quotas when they review parliamentary and local government boundaries.
- **Jury service:** they are used as the basis for selecting people to undertake jury service in England and Wales.
- **Law enforcement:** local authorities and the police can use the register for security, enforcing the law and preventing crime.
- **Credit ratings:** credit reference agencies can purchase copies of the registers to confirm names and addresses of people applying for credit and to prevent and detect money laundering.
- **Marketing:** the 'open register', an edited version of the register containing only details of those who have not opted out of appearing on it, is available to anyone who wants to buy a copy. Everyone can opt out of this register. The Commission has a long established view that the open register should be abolished.

1.8 The annual canvass also assists local authorities with their functions by conducting a periodic review of the people living in the area and the register is used for important local services. For example, the information on the register is used to check the information on other databases and to prevent and detect crimes and fraud.

1.9 There is no single electoral register in Great Britain but 380, one for each local authority area in England, Scotland and Wales. Each local authority's Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) is responsible for compiling and maintaining the local list of electors.¹⁴

The parliamentary and local government registers

1.10 Not every resident in the United Kingdom can register to vote. The entitlement to register comes from the entitlement to vote which differs according to the type of election. This means that EROs are required to keep¹⁵:

- **Parliamentary register:** this is the list of electors used for UK Parliamentary elections;
- **Local government register:** used for Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales, local government elections, European Parliament elections and Police and Crime Commissioner elections.

1.11 To be on one of these registers, a resident is required to have British, Irish, Commonwealth or European Union (EU) citizenship. Since 1999, EU

¹⁴ There are 32 local authorities in Scotland and the EROs for 27 of them are part of Valuation Joint Boards (VJBs). Appendix E lists each local authority in Scotland and where relevant, which VJB they are part of.

¹⁵ They must also keep a register of relevant citizens of the European Union entitled to vote at European Parliamentary elections and a register of those peers living outside the UK who have made a declaration to vote at European Parliamentary elections.

citizens resident in the UK have been eligible to vote at local, devolved and European Parliamentary elections and are therefore entitled to be on the local government registers (they must then complete an additional form to be registered to vote in the European Parliament elections in the UK rather than their home country).

1.12 However, as they are not eligible to vote at UK Parliamentary elections they are not entitled to be on the parliamentary registers.

1.13 Table 1.1 sets out entitlement to vote by citizenship. Those not listed here are not eligible to be on either the parliamentary or local government registers. There are a small number of specific exceptions to these general rules. For instance, all convicted prisoners currently lose their right to vote while they are imprisoned. Anyone convicted of electoral offences will also be disqualified from voting for a specific period.

1.14 IER has not affected the franchise for registration or voting.

Table 1.1: Franchise for citizenship and elections.¹⁶

Citizenship	Elections			Register
	UK Parliament	EU Parliament	Local government	
British	√	√	√	Parliamentary and local government
Commonwealth*	√	√	√	
Irish	√	√	√	
European Union	×	√	√	Local government

Notes: * Citizens resident in the UK who either have leave to remain or do not require such leave.

1.15 In England and Wales the age at which citizens become entitled to vote is 18, but the electoral registers also include records of ‘attainers’ – 16 and 17 year olds who will turn 18 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

1.16 In Scotland, following the passage of the Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting) Act 2015, the voting age for Scottish Parliamentary and local elections is 16. This means that all 16 and 17 year olds in Scotland are entitled to be on the local government register in Scotland and that attainers are 14 and 15 year olds who will turn 16 within the twelve month period starting on the 1 December after they make their application.

1.17 Entitlement for the parliamentary register in Scotland has not been affected by the new franchise so 16/17 year olds are still treated as attainers.

¹⁶ British citizens living abroad who have appeared on a UK electoral register in the last 15 years are also entitled to be on the register as overseas electors and can vote at European Parliamentary and UK Parliamentary elections.

The system for compiling the register

1.18 The electoral register is a property based database and each register entry is linked to a property. This means that the accuracy of its information is undermined by ongoing population mobility and EROs have to keep it up to date by adding and deleting records for home-movers as well as removing entries for those who have died and adding entries for newly eligible electors.

1.19 Electoral registration in Great Britain remains an ‘Enumeration system’ with a new register prepared annually (and reviewed most months), partly compiled via house-to-house canvassing. Information on approaches to electoral registration and international practices is available in Appendix D.

1.20 The majority of canvass activity generally takes place between July and November and, at its simplest, involves EROs sending out a form to each household and following-up, by postal reminders and/or door knocking as required, with those households which do not respond. At the end of the canvass, EROs update their electoral register and a revised version of the register is published by 1 December.¹⁷

1.21 However, the two systems present significant differences and below we outlined how the old system used to work and the new features brought about by IER.

Household registration system

1.22 Under the old system – the ‘household registration system’ – electoral registration was conducted on a household basis and designed around the annual house-to-house canvass which generally took place in autumn.

1.23 During the canvass, local authorities sent a form to each household in their area. The form required the householder to update the list of electors registered at the property: adding new electors and deleting those who were no longer resident in the household.¹⁸

1.24 One form, completed by one householder, would suffice to update entries at that property, with new electors added and inaccurate entries removed (for example, for electors who had moved or passed away). At the end of the canvass, EROs updated their electoral register and a revised version of the register was published by 1 December. In case of an election taking place during the canvass period, the publication of the register could be postponed.

¹⁷ Publication can be postponed if a by-election is taking place.

¹⁸ Respondents should also update electors’ details if necessary (e.g. change of name/surname) and correct errors (e.g.: spelling errors).

1.25 The system had remained largely unchanged since 1949 except for the introduction of ‘**rolling registration**’ in 2001 which allowed individuals to apply to register to vote outside the canvass period. As a result, EROs would publish an updated version of the register each month except in the two months preceding publication of the 1 December revised register.

1.26 Individuals did not have to provide any form of identification to validate their application.

Individual Electoral Registration

1.27 The main changes to the system are set out below. Table 1.2 also provides a comparison between the key features of the two systems, showing what has changed and what has not.

Personal identifiers and verification

1.28 Under the old system, there was no requirement to provide any form of identification at registration. This made the system vulnerable to fraud and inaccuracies.

1.29 Under IER, the ERO must verify the identity of the applicant before they can be added to the register, adding that necessary level of security. Applicants are therefore required to provide personal identifiers:

- Date of birth (DOB);
- National Insurance Number (NINo).¹⁹

1.30 These identifiers are then verified against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database which holds this information for everyone with a National Insurance Number.

1.31 If the applicant’s details are positively matched, the registration is confirmed and, subject to the applicant meeting the other requirements of registration (for example, residence, age, nationality) the individual is added to the electoral register. If the information cannot be matched against the DWP database or the applicant cannot provide NINo or date of birth, the ERO can use local records (for example, council tax records or university student enrolment data) to verify the identity of applicants. If the applicant’s identity cannot be verified by matching against DWP records and cannot be matched against locally held data, the applicant will be required to provide other specified documentary evidence. If the required documentary evidence cannot be provided, the applicant must provide an attestation in support of their application.

¹⁹ There are differences to the process for 14 and 15 year olds who wish to register in Scotland.

The two-stage canvassing approach

1.32 Each ERO is still required by law to conduct an annual canvass of all properties in the area to confirm its electoral register entries and to identify electors who have moved or were not previously registered.

1.33 EROs are now required to send a **Household Enquiry Form (HEF)** to all households (and follow-up with non-responders). This form, equivalent to the old canvass form, requires the respondent to cross out names of individuals no longer resident and add names of those who are now resident and eligible.

1.34 Importantly, it is no longer possible for a person to be added to the register as a result of their name being added to a returned canvass form (i.e. the HEF). Where returned HEFs include new (non-registered) individuals, a second communication – an **Invitation to Register (ITR)** – is sent out with a registration application form for such individuals to complete. It is this form that asks for the person's NINo and date of birth which allows them to become registered. Individuals can register directly online without completing this form.

1.35 An ERO also cannot delete an entry based solely on a name being crossed off on a returned HEF (as they could under household registration) – to do so they will need either a second source of information or to carry out a review of the individual's entitlement to remain registered.

Online registration

1.36 IER introduced online registration and individuals can now apply to register online at any point during the year.

1.37 The online registration system (<https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote>) is built around the registration requirements set out in law, including the provision of personal identifiers.

1.38 This was an important development in modernising the system as it introduces a quick method to register without need of paperwork. Individuals can go online and register directly by providing their NINo and date of birth.

Table 1.2: Key differences and similarities between household registration and Individual Electoral Registration (IER).

Household registration	Individual Electoral Registration
380 electoral registers in Great Britain, one for each local authority area.	
Annual canvass in autumn.	
Revised registers published annually (December) at the end of canvass and updated monthly.	
A person could be added to the register if their name was added to a canvass form.	A person cannot be added to the register if their name is added to a HEF. EROs are required to send an invitation to register to all individuals whose name has been added to a returned HEF and these have to make an individual application to register.
A person could be removed from the register if their name was crossed through on a canvass form.	If a person's name is crossed through on a HEF, the ERO must obtain a second source of information or carry out a review of their registration before they can remove that elector's entry .
Applications to register could be made on a paper form only.	Applications to register can be made on paper forms, online, and where offered by the ERO, by telephone and in person.
No personal identifiers required to register.	Personal identifiers (DOB and NINo) required.
No verification of identity.	An applicant's identity centrally verified with DWP data, locally held data, or, if that fails, by the applicant providing documentary evidence or, failing that, an attestation.
No power to impose a civil penalty.	EROs can impose a civil penalty on a person who fails to respond to an invitation to register.
Performance standards for EROs.	
Penalty for not responding to household form.	
Can register up to 12 days before polling day.	
Requirement to respond to household form.	

Our research programme

1.39 Since 2004, we have become the principal body in the UK undertaking research into electoral registration.

1.40 Much of this work has been focused on piloting and testing techniques to assess the registers and the accuracy of their records. This need to develop new methods arose from the limited scope to produce reliable estimates using existing approaches in the periods in between the census of the population which takes place every ten years.

Defining accuracy and completeness

1.41 The quality of the registers is considered in two main ways: their accuracy and their completeness.

Accuracy

1.42 By **accuracy** we mean that '*there are no false entries on the electoral registers*'.²⁰

1.43 The accuracy of the electoral register is therefore the measure of the percentage of entries on the registers which relate to verified and eligible voters who are resident at that address. Inaccurate register entries may relate to entries which have become redundant (for example, due to home movement), which are ineligible and have been included unintentionally, or which are fraudulent.

Completeness

1.44 By **completeness**, we mean that '*every person who is entitled to have an entry on an electoral register is registered*'.

1.45 The completeness of the electoral register therefore refers to the percentage of eligible people who are registered at their current address. The proportion of eligible people who are not included on the register at their current address constitutes the rate of under-registration.

1.46 There are various methods used to assess the quality of the electoral registers which differ mainly by the frequency with which they can be used and the reliability of the results. More information on the methods available to measure accuracy and completeness is available in Appendix A.

²⁰ Our definition of accuracy excludes minor errors, such as misspelling of an elector's name which would not prevent an eligible elector from being able to vote.

Research to monitor the transition to IER

1.47 Before the transition to IER started, we committed to a research programme aimed at measuring the impact of the transition, and new IER features, on the quality of the registers (accuracy and completeness).

1.48 In order to do so, we conducted two studies on the accuracy and completeness of the registers:

- **‘Before measure’**: the first one was conducted before the transition to IER started. The registers assessed were those published in February/March 2014 at the end of the last canvass conducted under the old system.²¹ The findings from this study are presented in our report [*‘The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain’*](#) published in July 2014.
- **‘After measure’**: the second one was conducted on the December 2015 registers, those published at the end of the transition to IER and at the end of the first full IER canvass.

1.49 This approach allows us to assess how the quality of the registers has changed during the transition.

1.50 During the transition we also collected a variety of other data to observe the changes to the register throughout the year and assess the efficacy of the new IER features as well as the impact of the transitional arrangements.

1.51 This report is the final report of our IER monitoring programme and brings together key data presented in our interim assessment to provide a full evaluation of the transition to IER and an initial assessment of the mechanics of the new system.

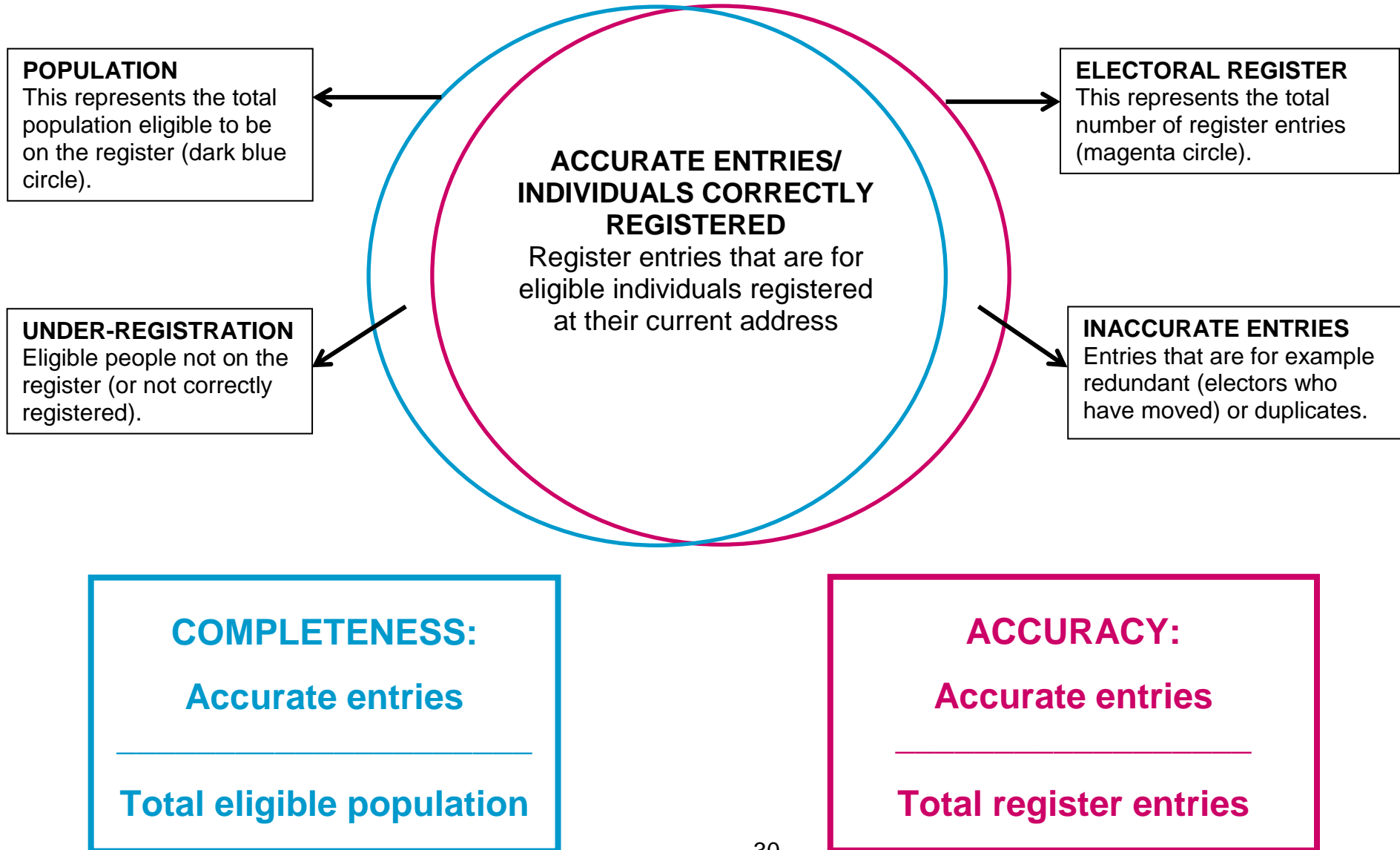
This report

1.52 The report is structured as follow:

- **Chapter 2** outlines the findings for accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 registers;
- **Chapter 3** provides an assessment of the transition and of the new IER provisions;
- **Chapter 4** sets out our conclusions and recommendations, and raises questions to policy-makers on the future of electoral registration.

²¹ The 2013 autumn canvass was postponed to facilitate the start of the transition to IER (Confirmation Live Run process) and was conducted between end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. The registers were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Scotland and Wales).

Figure 1.1: How are accuracy and completeness calculated?



2 Accuracy and completeness estimates

2.1 This chapter sets out the findings of the research conducted across Great Britain in order to estimate the accuracy and completeness of the December 2015 electoral registers.

Methodology

2.2 The accuracy and completeness estimates presented in this chapter are based on a house-to-house survey of 6,027 addresses in Great Britain across 116 local authorities. The majority of information was gathered from face-to-face interviews of 5,850 households, conducted by trained interviewers with the aim of gathering information from residents which could then be checked against the details held on the electoral registers. A small number of postal questionnaires (1,135) were issued in an attempt to reach those addresses where a face-to-face interview was not achieved of these 177 were returned.

2.3 The method builds on a number of previous studies undertaken by the Commission, most recently *'The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain'* which assessed the accuracy and completeness of the last registers produced under the household registration system. This was published in July 2014 and is used as the main point of comparison throughout this report.

Our previous reports can be found on [The Electoral Commission website](#)

2.4 This methodological approach has been assessed and validated through a separate study (*'Electoral registration in 2011'*) using data from the 2011 Census. We compared the results from that study with those generated from our previous house-to-house surveys and found high levels of consistency between the results and methods. We are therefore confident in the estimates we have produced using the house-to-house survey approach.

2.5 In this chapter, we also compare some specific findings from the study on the 2015 registers with those presented in *Electoral Registration in 2011* as, due to its sample size, it provides the most detailed analysis of the state of the registers under the household registration system.

2.6 Table 2.1 details our previous estimates of accuracy and completeness from 2011-2014 along with information on the methodology used to generate them. Full information on the methodology used to produce the estimates in this report can be found in Appendix C.

2.7 Any estimate of accuracy and completeness represents a 'snapshot' at a particular moment in the lifecycle of the registers. To date the snapshot has generally been taken in the period immediately following the compilation and publication of the annual registers when, historically, the completeness of the registers was at its highest. Our previous studies on the topic suggest that the completeness of the registers can decline by as much as up to one percentage point a month from the completion of the canvass.²²

2.8 In line with previous studies, the findings presented in this report are for the registers published in England, Wales and Scotland on 1 December 2015, at the end of the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and following the first full canvass conducted under the new system.²³

2.9 In 2014 the results were reported at the overall Great Britain level due to sample size. In this report we are able to report estimates for England, Scotland and Wales separately.²⁴ A factsheet for each country has been published alongside this report. Where they appear, comparisons with previous data at the country levels are based on the estimates produced using the census data in 2011 (*Electoral Registration in 2011*).

²² Electoral Commission, [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011); [Electoral registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

²³ Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) were required by law to publish their revised register by 1 December 2015 except in cases where there had been an election in their area during the period of the canvass, in which case they had the discretion to delay publication to up to 1 February 2016.

²⁴ The figures for England and Wales (combined) and Scotland were produced through two separate studies – one conducted by the Office for National Statistics and one by the National Record of Scotland. These studies used similar but different methodologies. Full details can be found in the report on our website: [Electoral registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

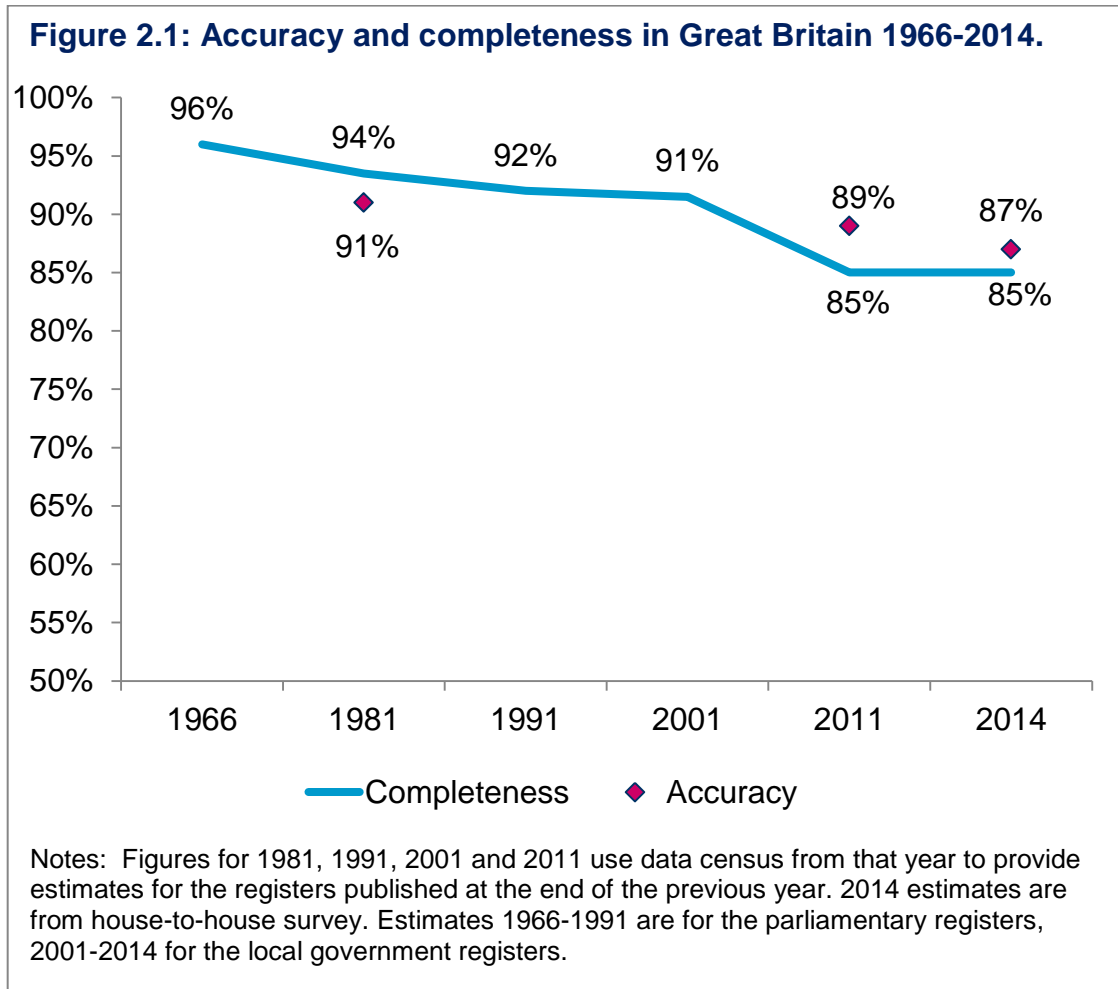
Table 2.1: Recent Electoral Commission national studies into the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers (2011-2014). All estimates are for the local government registers.

Report	Published	Electoral registers	Accuracy	Completeness	Methodology
<i>Great Britain's electoral registers 2011</i>	December 2011	December 2010	Not measured	85%-87% ²⁵	House-to-house survey Research designed to assess the quality of the April 2011 registers. An estimate for December 2010 was generated from the April 2011 results.
		April 2011	85%	82%	
<i>Electoral registration in 2011</i>	July 2014	December 2010	89%-92% (E&W)	85% (E&W)	Census 2011 data Conducted separately in England & Wales and in Scotland (only April 2011 registers). Used different method to estimate accuracy that generated higher results. (Only available following the census)
		April 2011	88%-90% (E&W) 90% (Scot.)	83% (E&W) 87% (Scot.)	
<i>The quality of the 2014 electoral registers</i>	July 2014	Feb/March 2014	87%	85%	House-to-house survey Methodology based on the one used for <i>Great Britain's electoral registers 2011</i>

²⁵ 'Great Britain's electoral registers 2011' focused on the April 2011 registers. The study therefore provided only a rough estimate for the December 2010 parliamentary and local government registers (no distinction): 85-87%.

Historical context

2.10 Figure 2.1 below shows the estimates for accuracy and completeness that have been produced between 1966 and 2014. While national estimates of completeness have been produced irregularly, they have at least been produced with relative uniformity meaning it is possible to observe a trend over time. In contrast, comparable accuracy estimates have been produced less frequently.



2.11 Although different methods have been used to calculate accuracy, the estimates produced in 1981, and subsequently in 2011 and 2014, suggest that the accuracy of the electoral registers has remained broadly consistent over time.^{26 27 28}

²⁶ Todd and Butcher, *Electoral registration in 1981* (1981). This study set out estimates for the accuracy of the registers for April 1981 and used these estimates to calculate what the accuracy of the registers may have been at the time of the qualifying date for the canvass (October 1980). The study found that between 10.4% and 13.5% of the names on the April 1981 registers belong to people who by that time were not living at the address listed in the registers. The Office of Population Censuses and Surveys (OPCS) also estimated the

2.12 There has however been greater fluctuation in levels of completeness. The highest levels were recorded in 1950 and 1966 (96% at the end of the canvass in both 1950 and 1966) but had declined slightly by 1981 (94%) and again in 1991 (91-93%) and 2001 (91-92%).²⁹

2.13 Levels of completeness declined more dramatically after 2001, falling to 85% in 2011. Although there is not just one explanation, but multiple factors that affect completeness, these broadly fall into three main categories: population change, public engagement with electoral democracy and registration practices (see table 2.2 below).³⁰

2.14 In our 2014 report we found this decline had stopped as turnout and population mobility stabilised while issues with registration practices had been addressed through measures such as performance standards.³¹

proportion of names on the registers that were inaccurate in October 1981 was between 6.1% and 9.4%.

²⁷ The 1991 OPCS study also considered redundant entries on the registers in Great Britain at the time of the 1991 census. This found that between 6.0% and 7.9% of the names listed at addresses which were occupied at the time of the census did not correspond with people living there at the time. However unlike the 1981 study, an estimate for the percentage of names on the registers that were listed at addresses which were unoccupied at the time of the census was not added to this percentage. Consequently, the figures do not represent a complete picture of the possible scale of inaccuracies on the registers.

²⁸ The method used to calculate the accuracy of the 2014 registers was different from the one used by the Office for National Statistics in 2011.

²⁹ P.G Gray and A. Gee, *Electoral registration for parliamentary elections: an enquiry made for the Home Office* (HMSO: London 1967)

³⁰ The Electoral Commission, [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011), [Electoral registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

³¹ The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014).

Table 2.2: Explanation for the decline in completeness over time.

Time period	Contributing factors
<p>1966 – 2000</p> <p>‘Gradual decline’</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Increase in population mobility. • The decline in the 1980s and the early 1990s has been linked to the introduction of the Community Charge (commonly known as the ‘poll tax’) and attempts to avoid paying the new tax by de-registering: estimates suggest that 350,000 people removed themselves from the electoral registers during this time.³²
<p>2001 – 2011</p> <p>‘Accelerated decline’</p>	<p>Electoral participation</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lowering turnout at all types of UK elections, especially in 2001 (59% compared with 71% in 1997 and 78% in 1992). Decreased interest in traditional party politics. <p>Changing population</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Population mobility: increased immigration from the Commonwealth (late 1990s onwards) and the EU (2004 onwards). In <i>Electoral registration in 2011</i> we concluded that overall immigration is likely to have reduced the completeness of the registers by approximately 1-2%³³ • Fall in home ownership (from 69% in 2001 to 64% in 2011, the first fall since records began in 1918) and corresponding increase in private renters.³⁴ <p>Registration practices</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Changes in canvassing practices and declining form response rate in early 2000s.

³² McLean, I. and Smith, J. *The UK poll tax and the electoral register: unintended consequences?* (1991), Warwick University, Economic Research Papers, N. 398. McLean and Smith subsequently upgraded this estimate to 600,000 individuals. The Electoral Commission, [The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (March 2010).

³³ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

³⁴ The Office for National Statistics, *A century of home ownership in renting in England and Wales* (April 2013).

The December 2015 registers: accuracy and completeness at the end of the transition to IER

2.15 Our study on the February/March 2014 registers, those published at the end of the last annual canvass conducted under the old system, found the parliamentary registers to be 86% complete and 86% accurate and the local government registers to be 85% complete and 87% accurate.^{35 36}

2.16 The results show that the Great Britain **December 2015**:

- **Parliamentary registers** were 85% complete and 91% accurate;
- **Local government registers** were 84% complete and 91% accurate.

2.17 This means that during the transition to IER - 10 June 2014 to 1 December 2015 – the overall accuracy of the registers increased by an estimated four percentage points. Completeness appears to have remained largely stable although it seems likely there has been a decline of less than one percentage point.

2.18 The decline in completeness is not statistically significant at a headline level but there have been statistically significant drops in completeness among younger age groups and socio-demographic characteristics more associated with the young, such as private renters and recent home movers.

2.19 These specific decreases suggest that there is likely to have been a genuine decline at the headline level.

2.20 The findings from this accuracy and completeness study suggest that most, but not all, of the entries removed at the end of the transition to IER in December 2015 were inaccurate, explaining why accuracy has improved while levels of completeness have remained largely stable.^{37 38}

2.21 Parliament chose to bring forward the end of the transition (and hence the deletion of these entries) from December 2016 to December 2015. At the time the Commission advised against bringing forward the end of the transition as we had no data on which to judge the nature of the entries that

³⁵ The 2013 autumn canvass was postponed to facilitate the start of the transition to IER (Confirmation Live Run process) and was conducted between end of 2013 and beginning of 2014. The registers were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Scotland and Wales).

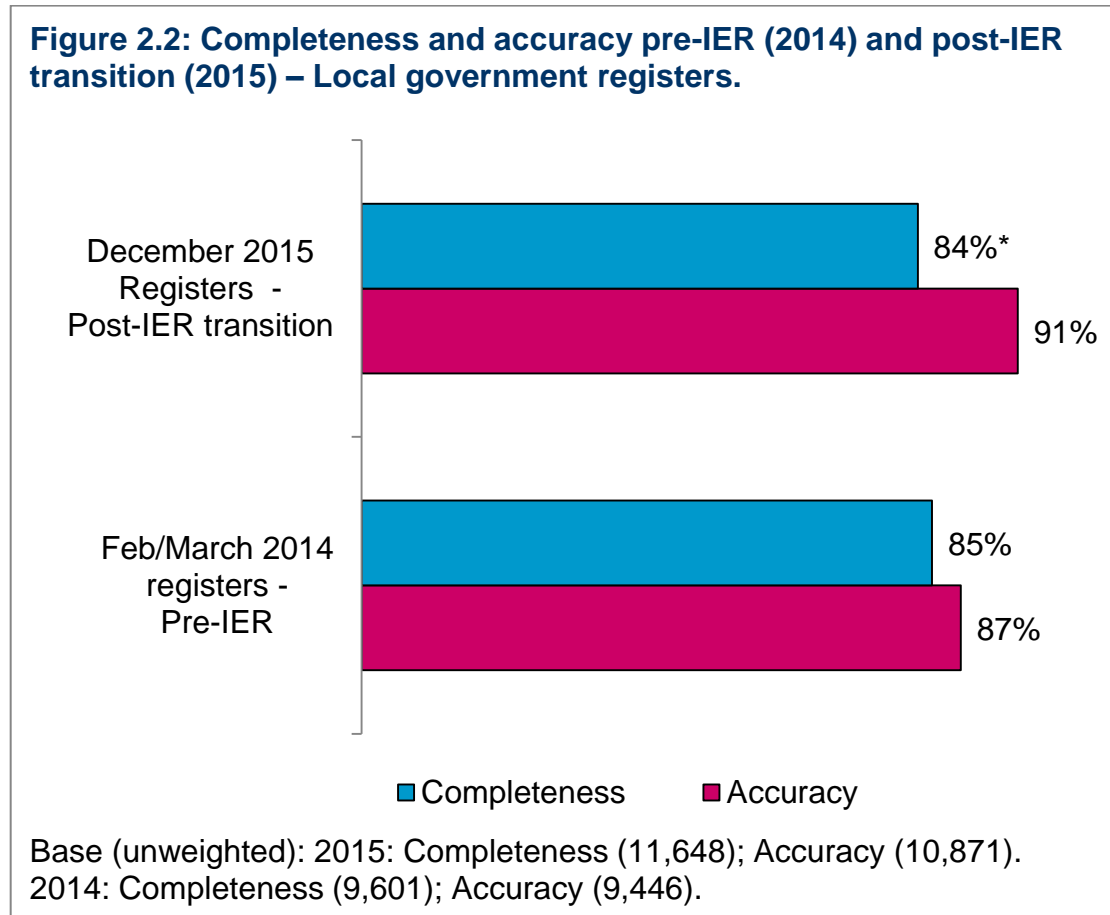
³⁶ The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014).

³⁷ The Electoral Commission, [Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (February 2016).

³⁸ Any entry which had not either been successfully matched against DWP data or had personal identifiers provided and verified was removed at the end of the transitional period.

would be removed. In the absence of data we also saw a risk from removing the entries, ahead of the planned May 2016 polls, in putting the onus on voters to potentially need to re-register rather than on EROs to check the accuracy of these entries.

2.22 The results of this study suggest that there was no notable effect on the completeness of the registers from the removal of these entries and that the main impact is likely to have been an improvement in accuracy (see Figure 2.2 below).

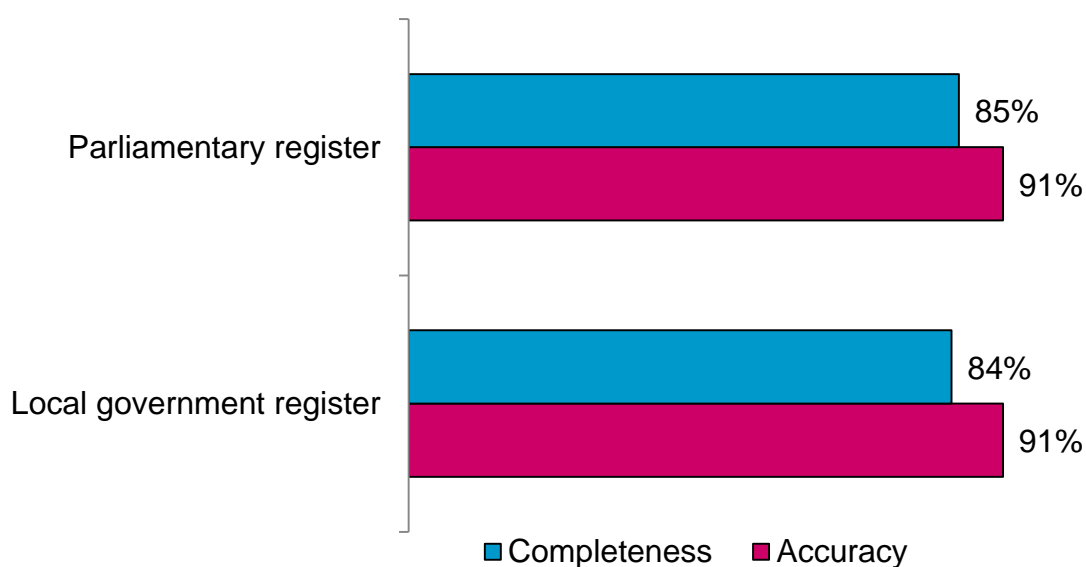


Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.23 Figure 2.3 shows the levels of accuracy and completeness for the local government and parliamentary December 2015 registers. As we have found previously the difference between the accuracy and completeness of the two registers is negligible and is not statistically significant.

2.24 Consequently, except where stated, this chapter outlines the figures as they relate to the local government registers as they include the larger proportion of the electorate (see Table 1.1 for further detail on the differences between the two registers).

Figure 2.3: Completeness and accuracy of the December 2015 registers in Great Britain.



Base (unweighted): Completeness – 11,155 for parliamentary registers; 11,648 for local government registers.
Base (unweighted): Accuracy - 10,594 for parliamentary registers; 10,871 for local government registers.

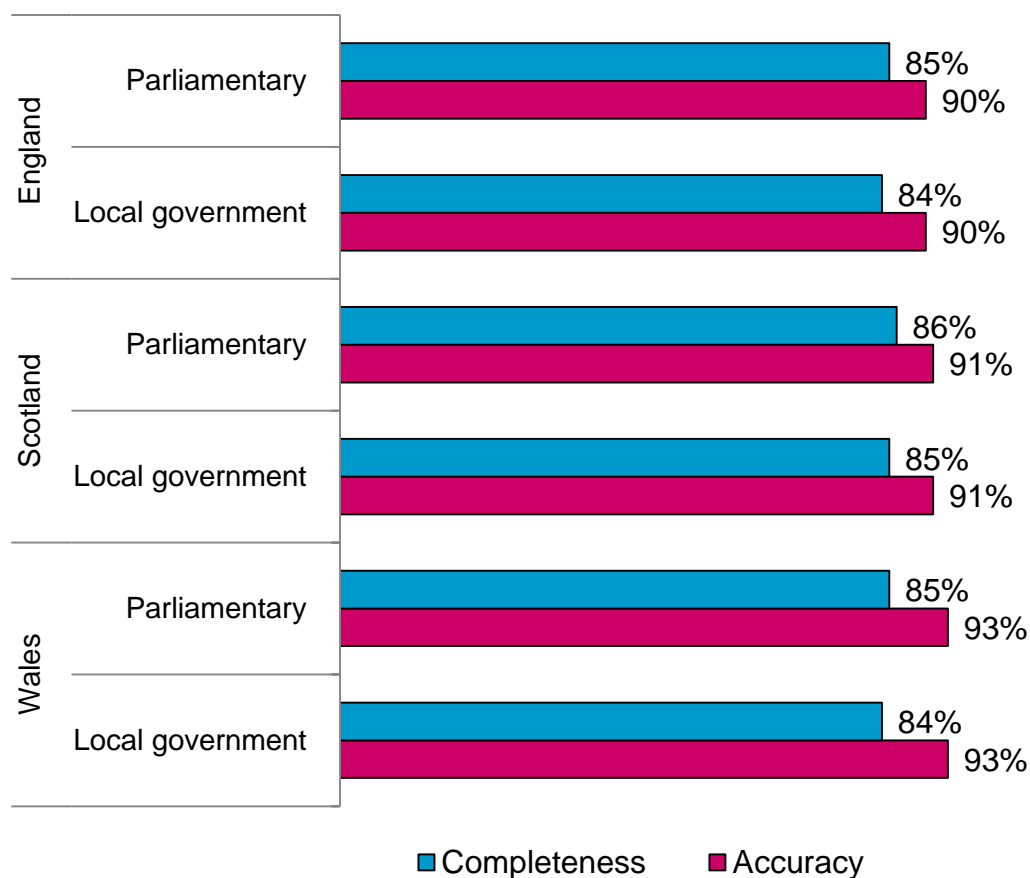
National estimates

2.25 Figure 2.4 below sets out the accuracy and completeness estimates for England, Scotland and Wales for both the parliamentary and local government registers published in December 2015.

2.26 It shows that the highest levels of accuracy are found in Wales (93%) while the lowest are found in England (90%).³⁹ Levels of completeness across the three countries are similar and the differences between them are not statistically significant.

³⁹ The results show a statistically significant difference between levels of accuracy in Wales and levels of accuracy in England but not between Scotland and England or Scotland and Wales.

Figure 2.4: Accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in England, Scotland and Wales, December 2015



Base (unweighted) Parliamentary registers:
 Accuracy: England (7,837), Scotland (1,388), Wales (1,369).
 Completeness: England (8,221), Scotland (1,458), Wales (1,476).
 Base (unweighted) Local government registers:
 Accuracy: England (8,069), Scotland (1,421), Wales (1,381).
 Completeness: England (8,635), Scotland (1,509), Wales (1,504).

2.27 Due to sample size, the estimates produced on the 2014 registers provide combined results for Great Britain only. Although we used a different methodology, it was possible to present separate estimates for England, Wales and Scotland in our 2011 study on the registers conducted with census data.^{40 41}

2.28 These 2011 estimates indicated slightly higher levels of completeness in Scotland and slightly lower levels of completeness in Wales. Accuracy was

⁴⁰ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

⁴¹ Estimates were produced for both the December 2010 registers and the April 2011 registers while the estimates for Scotland were produced for the April registers only.

found to be broadly consistent across England, Scotland and Wales at approximately 90% for the April 2011 registers.⁴²

2.29 A fact sheet for each country can be found in [on our website](#). Unless stated, the results presented below are for Great Britain as a whole. Any significant differences by country are noted.

Completeness

2.30 The **parliamentary** registers for Great Britain were found to be **85% complete**, and the **local government** registers **84% complete**.

Geographic variables

Urban/rural classification

2.31 The results confirm that, as we have seen previously, there is a significant difference between levels of completeness in urban and rural areas. Overall, rural areas have a higher completeness rate than urban areas. This trend was corroborated by our analysis of the 2011 census data which indicated that completeness rates in the least populated areas were four percentage points higher than the completeness rates for the most densely populated areas.⁴³

Table 2.3: Completeness by urban/rural classification - local government registers.

Register	Completeness	
	Urban	Rural
December 2015 registers	84%*	86%*
February/March 2014 registers	84%	87%

Note: Base (unweighted): December 2015 – 11,648, February/March 2014 – 9,601

* Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

Local authority type

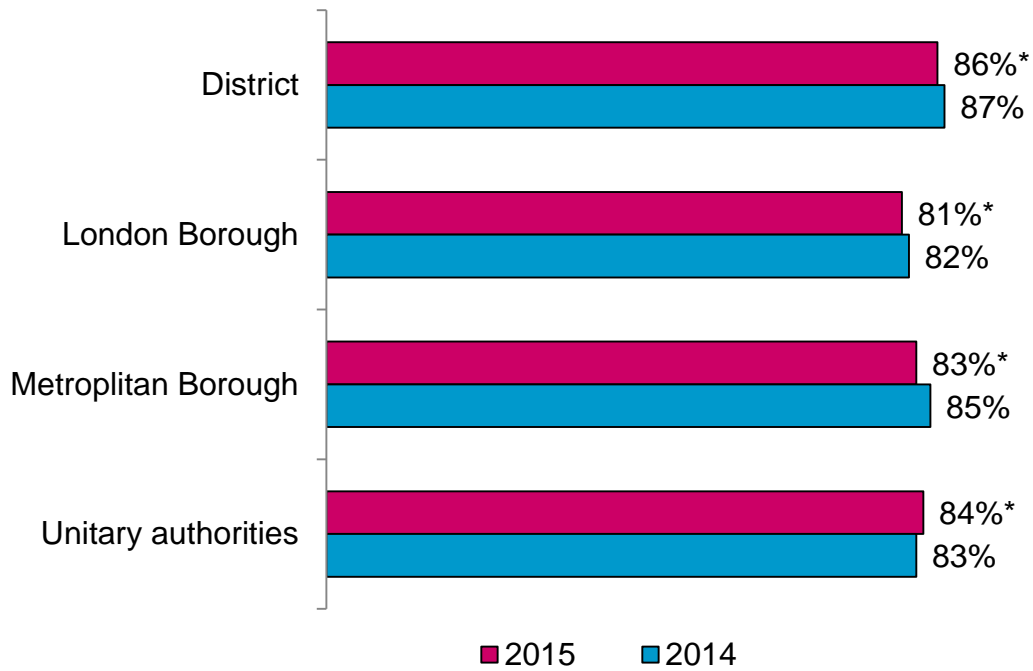
2.32 Figure 2.5 below shows completeness by local authority type pre and post the introduction of IER. As shown, the pattern in 2015 is similar to that in 2014. As we found under the old household system of registration, levels of completeness tend to be higher in Districts (86%) compared with London Boroughs (81%), Metropolitan Boroughs (83%) and Unitary Authorities (84%).

2.33 The findings suggest that there has been a slight decline in completeness in Metropolitan Boroughs and District authorities however these are not statistically significant.

⁴² The approach to measuring accuracy was different and therefore the estimate for England and Wales was provided as a range (88%-90%).

⁴³ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014)

Figure 2.5: Completeness by local authority type - December 2015 and February/March 2014 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): Dec 2015 – 11,648; Feb/Mar 2014 - 9,601

Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.34 In 2014 London was found to have significantly lower completeness rates than District authorities and Metropolitan Boroughs. Post IER-transition, London Boroughs continue to have lower levels of completeness however the slight decline in completeness in Metropolitan Boroughs to 83% means that levels are no longer statistically significantly different to those found in London.

2.35 The regression analysis presented in *Electoral registration in 2011* suggested that the lower levels of completeness in London are linked to the demographic characteristics of the city. When such variables are controlled for, being from London actually increases the likelihood of being registered.⁴⁴

2.36 The impact of demographic characteristics is explored in detail later in this chapter.

Population mobility

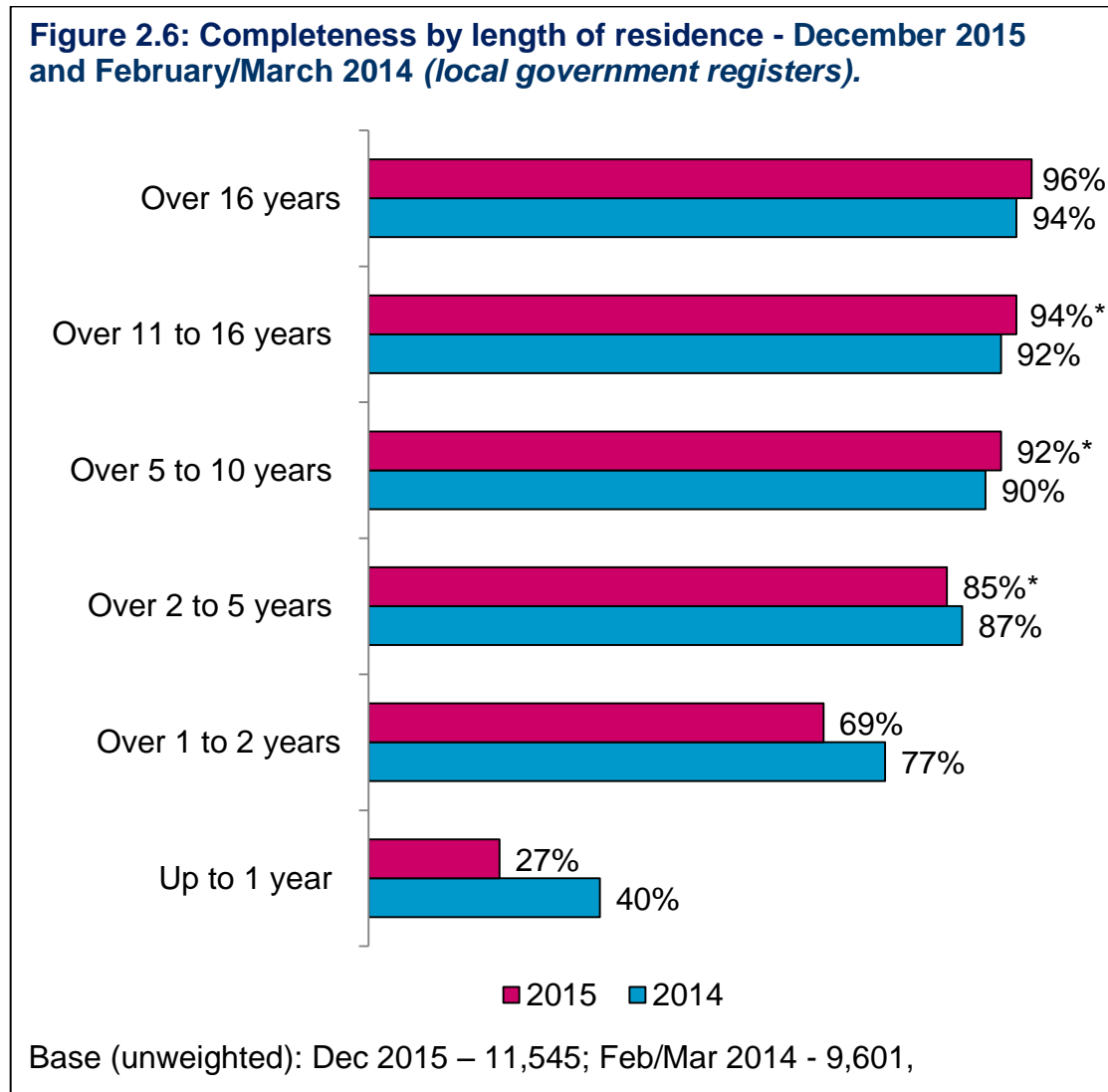
Length of residence

2.37 Our previous research into the registers has found a clear connection between home movement and completeness: as the register is a property-based database, greater mobility is associated with lower levels of completeness while the longer an individual has been resident at their

⁴⁴ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

property, the more likely they are to appear on the electoral register. These patterns remain true after the transition to IER as the chart below shows.

2.38 Figure 2.6 also shows that post IER-transition, the impact of mobility is more pronounced among those who have lived at their address for fewer than two years with completeness falling most among recent movers. The December 2015 registers show only 27% completeness among those who have lived at their address for up to a year compared with 40% in 2014. There is 69% completeness among those who have lived at their address for between one and two years, compared with 77% in 2014.



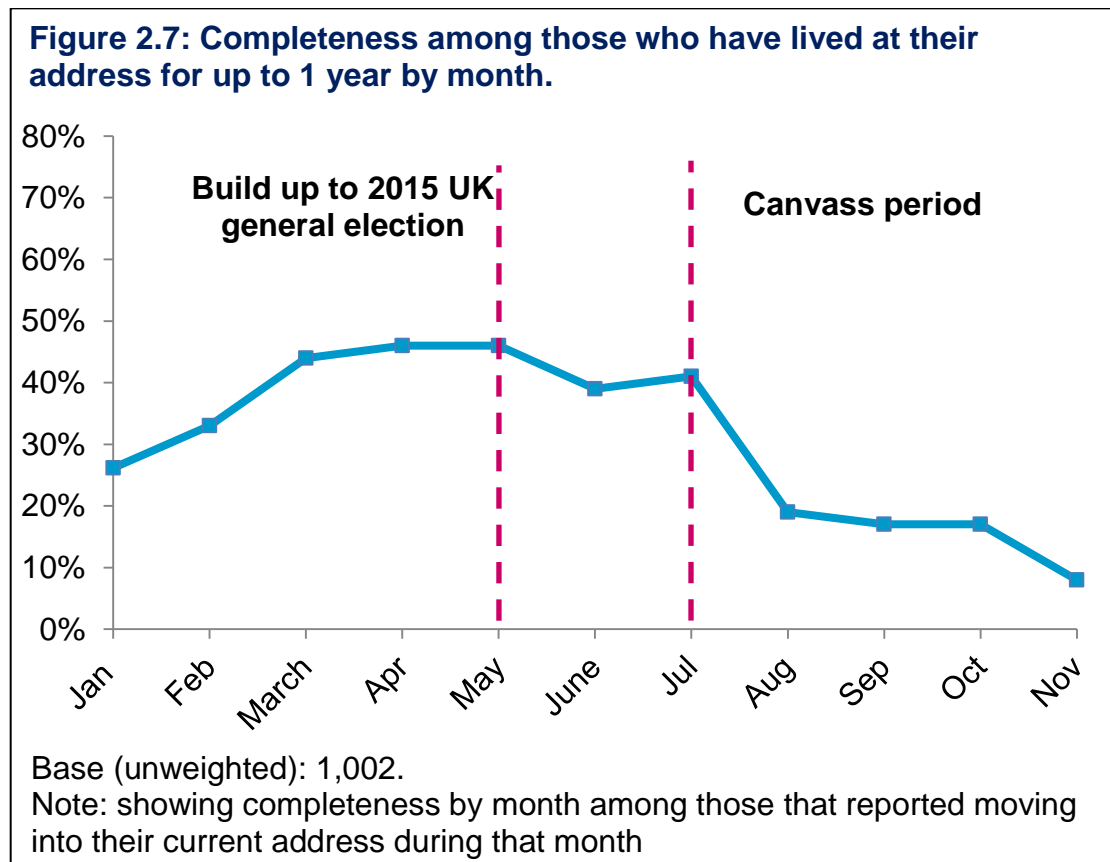
Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.39 We asked those who had been resident at their property for less than one year to specify which month they moved in. This allows us to verify how completeness changes throughout the year.

2.40 In our previous report we marked the fact that among recent movers (those that have moved house within the last year) completeness tends to be higher among those that moved into their property before the start of the annual canvass.⁴⁵ The findings from this study also show that post IER-transition this trend remains true: completeness among those that moved before 1 July, when the canvass begins, is 41% compared with 19% among those that moved after 1 July.

2.41 Figure 2.7 below shows completeness among recent movers by the month that they moved in. Not only does it show that levels of completeness are higher among those that moved before the canvass period but also shows significantly higher levels of completeness among those that moved in before the May 2015 UK general election. The significant influence electoral events have on registration rates is further demonstrated by our registration data (para 3.22-3.38) which shows that applications peaked in the months leading up to the UK general election.

2.42 Completeness is also comparatively higher among those that moved in after May but before July, indicating that those that live at their property from the start of the canvass are more likely to be on the register. Those who moved in once the canvass was underway displayed significantly lower levels of completeness.



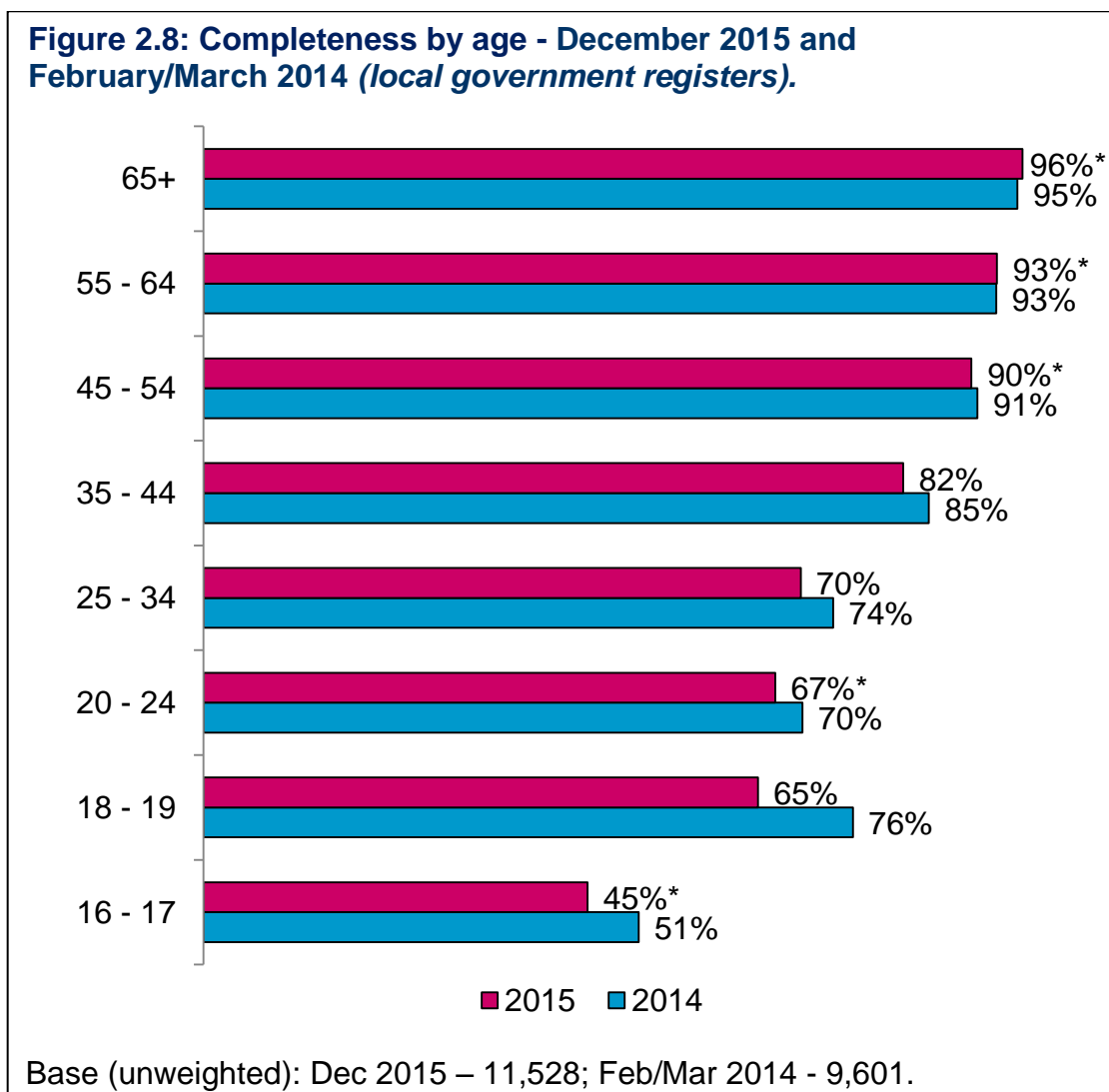
⁴⁵ The Electoral Commission, [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011).

Demographic characteristics

Age

2.43 In 1981 analysis of the electoral registers found that there were higher levels of non-registration among younger age groups with completeness at approximately 86% among 18 and 19 year olds compared with 90% among those aged 50 or above.⁴⁶ Since then, all studies on electoral registration have consistently found that levels of completeness differ by age group, with older groups more likely to be registered.

2.44 The findings of this study also reflect this pattern as shown in Figure 2.8 below. The highest level of completeness is seen for those aged 65+ (96%) and the lowest level is recorded for attainers (16 and 17 year olds, 45%).



Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

⁴⁶ Todd J and Butcher B, *Electoral Registration in 1981* (1982).

2.45 As the chart also shows there has been a decline in completeness among those aged under 45. The fall among 18-19 year olds, 25-34 year olds and 35-44 year olds is statistically significant.

2.46 The apparent reduction in completeness among attainers (16 and 17 year olds) is not statistically significant although the decrease in the absolute numbers registered confirms a decline.

2.47 In the past we have observed that completeness generally increases with age, with one exception: previously those aged 18 or 19 have been more likely to appear on the register than those aged between 20 and 24. The data for the 2014 registers in the chart above shows this trend with completeness at 76% for 18 and 19 year olds compared with 70% among 20-24s.

2.48 In *The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain* we stated that this pattern can largely be explained by the fact that the younger age group (18-19 year olds) are more likely to be living at their parents/guardians' address and if so are likely to have been resident there for several years.⁴⁷ Data from the Labour Force Survey (LFS) supports this assertion, demonstrating that there is a significant drop of in the proportion of people living with their parents between the two age groups (see Figure 2.9 below).

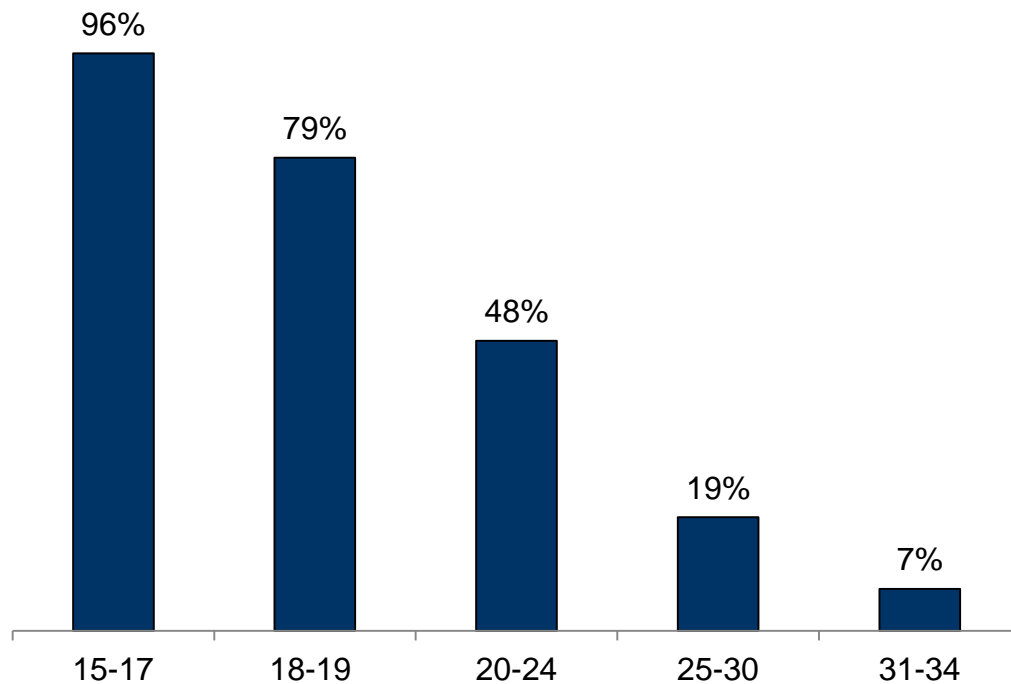
2.49 Post IER-transition this pattern in registration has changed. There has been a decline in completeness among 18-19 year olds which means we now see similar levels of completeness among this group and 20-24 year olds. The proportion of young people living with their parents, however, has not changed.⁴⁸

2.50 This indicates that the change in the pattern of completeness by age could be a consequence of the introduction of IER. Under the previous household system parents/guardians could register their eligible children living at their address, perhaps explaining the previous higher – although still significantly lower than the overall - levels of completeness among 18 and 19 year olds and their subsequent fall following the introduction of IER.

⁴⁷ The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014).

⁴⁸ Office for National Statistics, *Labour Force Survey* (November 2015).

Figure 2.9: Proportion of young adults aged 15-34 living with their parents by age, UK, 2015.



Source: Labour Force Survey (LFS) 2015, Office for National Statistics

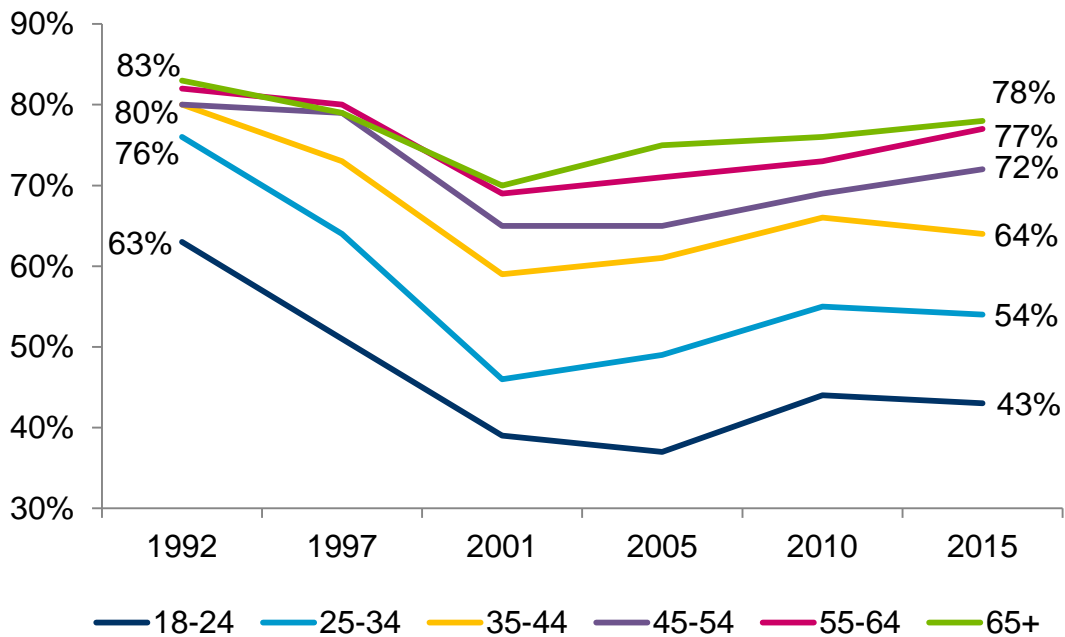
2.51 As we have noted earlier there is a strong correlation between the length of time an individual has lived at their address and the likelihood that they are registered to vote (see paragraph 2.37-2.42). Lower levels of completeness among under 35s are firmly connected to mobility with younger age groups significantly more likely to have recently moved home than older age groups. Data from the 2013 – 2014 English Housing Survey shows that 55% of all recent movers are under the age of 34.⁴⁹

2.52 However, as we have also previously argued, mobility alone does not account for lower levels of registration among young people. Lower levels of engagement with politics and voting are also a relevant factor.

2.53 Figure 2.10 shows voter turnout at the previous six UK general elections by age, illustrating the decline in election participation among all ages since 1992, and indicates that the decline has been most severe among those under 35.

⁴⁹ Department for Communities and Local Government, English Housing Survey 2013-14

Figure 2.10: Turnout at UK Parliamentary general elections - 1992 to 2015.



Source: Ipsos Mori, How Britain voted.

Gender

2.54 As we have noted in the past, women are more likely to be registered than men. For the December 2015 registers, as in 2014, there is an approximate difference of 2% between men and women with men estimated to be 83% complete compared to 85% for women.⁵⁰

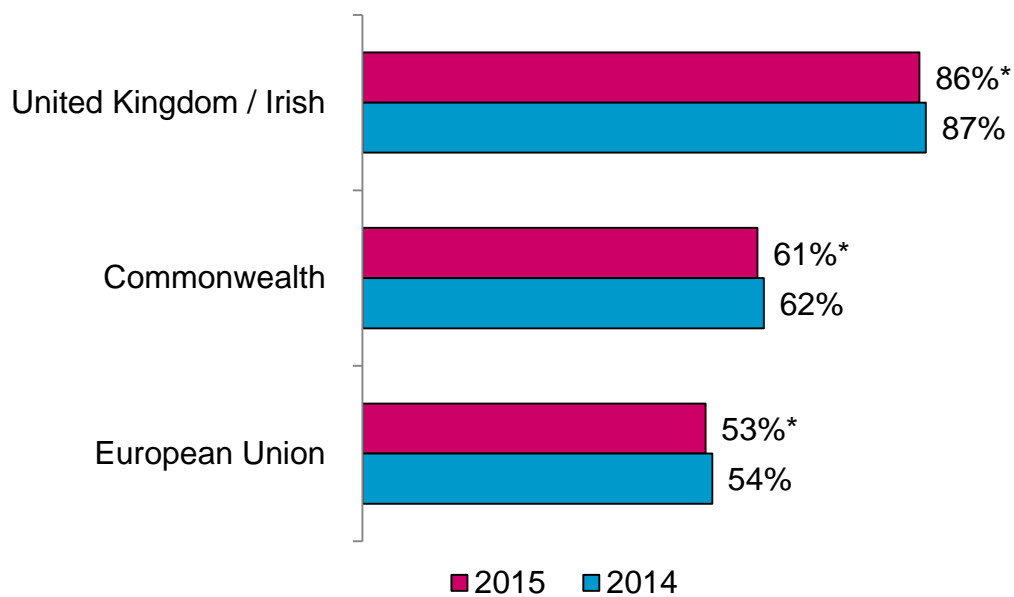
Nationality

2.55 Previous research has shown that registration rates are lower among eligible non-UK nationals than among UK and Irish nationals.

2.56 The chart below presents the level of completeness by nationality for the February/March 2014 registers and the December 2015 registers. It shows the pattern has remained consistent: Commonwealth and European Union citizens are considerably less likely to be registered than UK/Irish citizens.

⁵⁰ As in 2014 this difference is statistically significant. The 2014 study also found that completeness for women was 86% compared with 84% for men.

Figure 2.11: Completeness by nationality - December 2015 and February/March 2014 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): Dec 2015 – 11,599; Feb/Mar 2014 - 9,601.

Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.57 While there have always been higher levels of completeness among UK/Irish citizens the levels among Commonwealth and EU citizens has declined as the proportion of the population from these areas has increased.

2.58 Estimates produced for the 2001 registers suggest that completeness was approximately 81% among EU citizens and 83% among Commonwealth citizens, significantly higher than the estimates that have been produced from 2011 onwards.^{51 52} As explored in *Great Britain's electoral registers 2011*, significant increases in immigration occurred from the late 1990s in the case of the Commonwealth and from 2004 in the case of the EU.⁵³

2.59 Completeness by nationality is also related to length of residence in the UK: our study on electoral registration using the 2011 census data found that in England and Wales 26% of those who had been resident for under one year were registered compared to 76% of those who had been in the UK between 5 and 10 years.⁵⁴

2.60 Nationality is one of the demographic characteristics that helps explain the lower levels of completeness in London. The table below shows the levels of completeness for the local government and parliamentary registers for London in comparison with the rest of England, Wales and Scotland. The

⁵¹ Note small sample size for EU citizens (103).

⁵² The Electoral Commission, [Understanding electoral registration](#) (September 2005).

⁵³ The Electoral Commission, [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011).

⁵⁴ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

difference in the franchise for the two registers, the local government register includes EU citizens, means that the parliamentary register is always likely to be more complete than the local government. As the table shows however the difference in completeness between the two London registers is larger than anywhere else in Great Britain⁵⁵.

Table 2.4: Completeness of local government registers compared with parliamentary registers (December 2015).

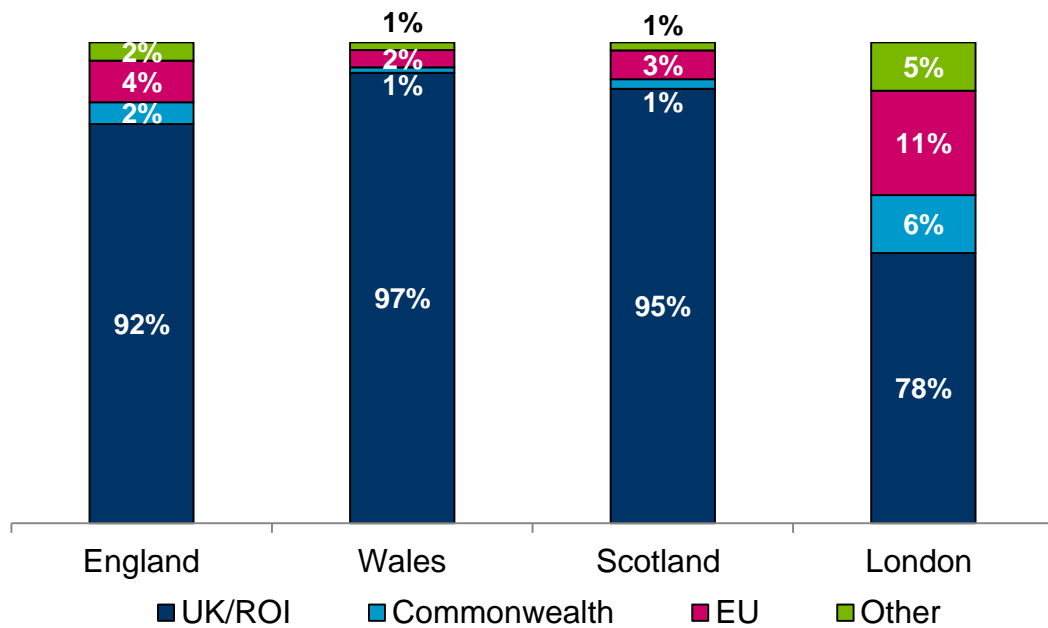
	Local government	Parliamentary
Great Britain	84%	85%
England (excluding London)	84%	85%
Scotland	85%	86%
Wales	84%	85%
London	81%	84%

Base (unweighted): Local government - Great Britain 11,648, England (excl. London) 7,160, Scotland 1,509, Wales 1,504, London 1,475. Parliamentary - Great Britain 11,155, England (excl. London) 6,932, Scotland 1,458, Wales 1,476, London 1,289.

2.61 The most likely reason for this is the higher proportion of non-UK/Irish citizens in London's population. Figure 2.12 below shows that 78% of London's population are UK/Irish citizens, in comparison this figure is over 90% for England overall and Wales and Scotland.

⁵⁵ The difference in completeness between the local government register for London and the other areas listed (Great Britain, England, Wales and Scotland) is statistically significant; the differences between the Parliamentary registers are not.

Figure 2.12: Resident population by nationality, 2014.



Source: Office for National Statistics, Annual Population Survey (APS) resident population of the United Kingdom by country of birth and nationality in 2014 (August 2015).

Ethnicity

2.62 As Figure 2.13 shows, completeness is higher for those who give their ethnicity as white (85%) while those whose ethnicity falls into the ‘Other’ category report the lowest levels of completeness (73%). The difference between the level of completeness for the white population and that for all other ethnic group is statistically significant however the variation between the non-white categories is not. For example the difference in completeness for the black population (76%) is not statistically significantly lower than that of the Asian population (80%). This is in line with our previous findings and the levels of completeness of the registers compiled before IER.

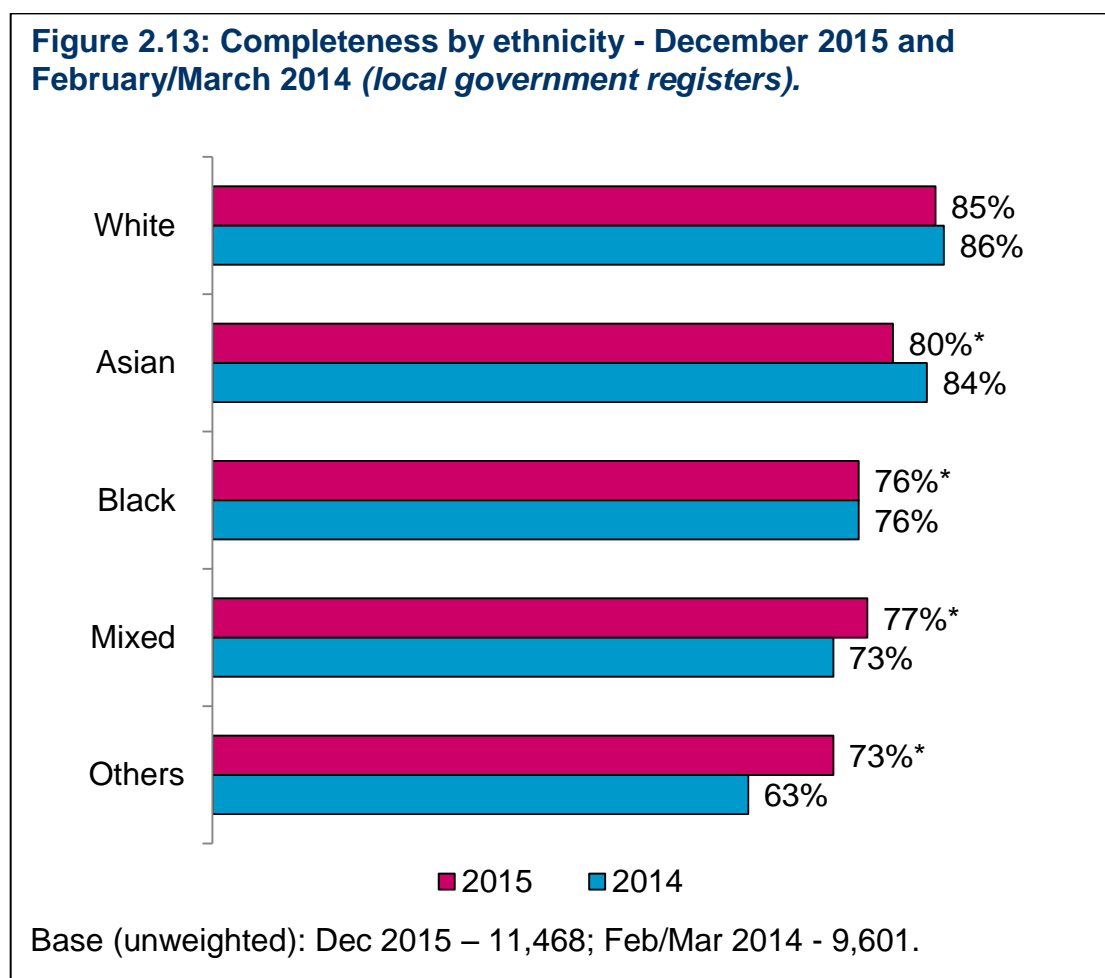
2.63 There has been a statistically significant decline in completeness among the white population, from 86% in 2014 to 85% in 2015, which mirrors the overall likely drop in completeness from 85% to 84%.⁵⁶ The changes between 2014 and 2015 among other ethnic groups are not statistically significant meaning it is not possible to determine exactly how IER has impacted on levels of completeness among other ethnic groups.

2.64 The broad category findings outlined below are useful in identifying under-registration but the small size of the sample means that more nuanced analysis is not possible. However in our previous study, *Electoral registration*

⁵⁶ 86% of the resident population of England and Wales reported their ethnic group as White in the 2011 Census, correspondingly 87% of the interviewed sample for Great Britain gave their ethnicity as white.

in 2011, which used census data, we were able to breakdown some of the broader categories in order to provide a more granular assessment of how completeness varies by ethnicity.

2.65 We found that within the Asian population, those whose ethnicity is Indian tend to be more likely to be registered than their Pakistani and Bangladeshi counterparts. Similarly black people of Caribbean origin are more likely to be registered than those of African origin. The lowest levels of registration overall were found among those who provided no ethnicity at all on the census form.⁵⁷



Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

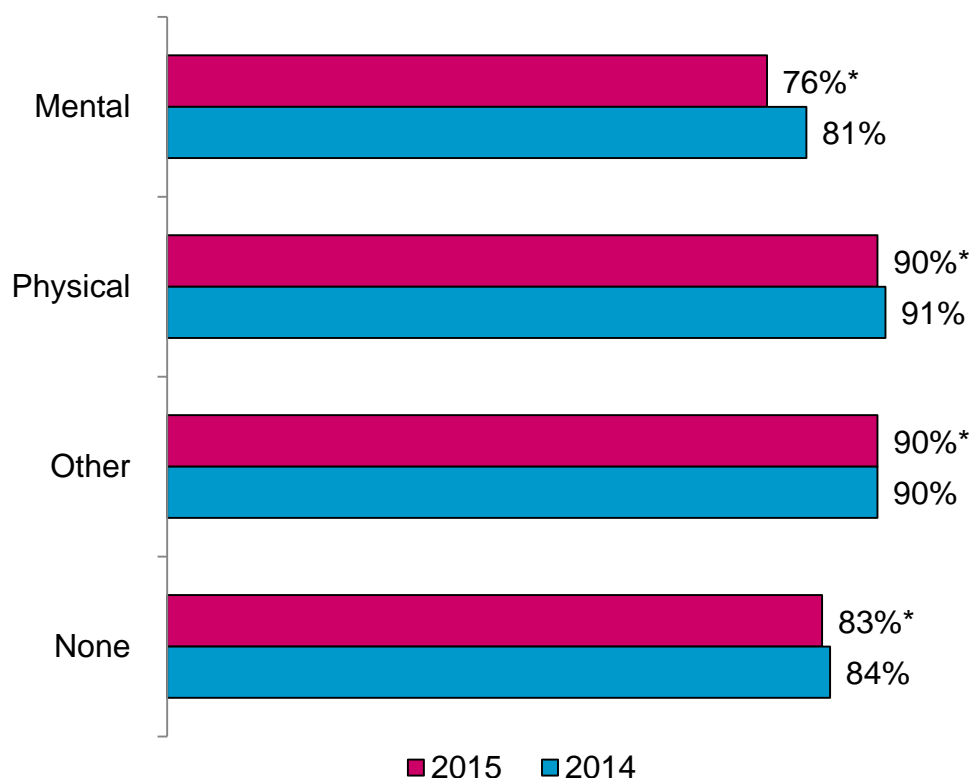
Disability

2.66 We reported on levels of completeness by disability for the first time in 2014. Findings from this study support those reported in 2014: people with a long standing physical condition or disability are more likely to be registered (90%) than those without a disability (83%), while those with a longstanding mental condition or disability are less likely (76%) – note that the change from 2014 is not statistically significant.

⁵⁷ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

2.67 As we observe with age, it is possible that this difference in the levels of registration is connected to length of residency. Data collected through this survey suggests that people with a physical disability are less likely to move home than the general population (overall 33% of those surveyed have lived at their address for over 16 years, this figure rises to 49% among those who report having a physical disability).

Figure 2.14: Completeness by disability - December 2015 and February/March 2014 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): Dec 2015 – 11,245; Feb/Mar 2014 - 9,601.

Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

Social and economic conditions

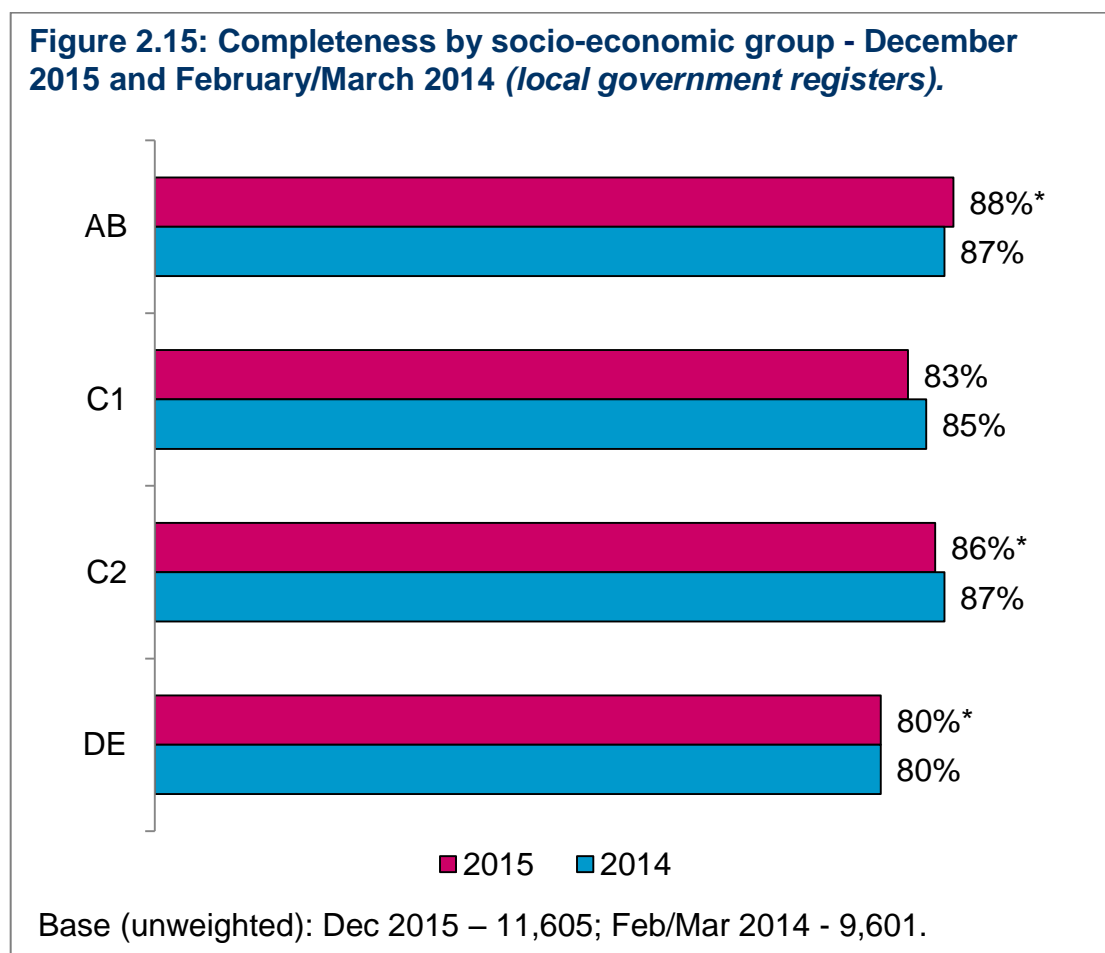
Socio-economic group

2.68 The findings on the 2014 electoral registers, published under the old household registration system showed statistically significant variation in levels of completeness by social group with completeness among AB and C2 households significantly higher than among C1 and DE households.

2.69 This pattern is sustained on the 2015 registers, as figure 2.15 below shows. The largest degree of variation is 8 percentage points between AB (88%) and DE (80%), however the difference between C2 (86%) and C1 (83%) is also significant, as is the difference between C2 and DE. Among all four groups, only C1 returned a statistically significant drop in completeness since 2014 (-2 percentage points).

2.70 Lower levels of registration among those classified as DE is mirrored by their participation in elections as the marked decline in turnout over the last 20 years is more visible among this group than any other. While an estimated 77% of DEs voted at the 1992 general election, at the 2015 general election DE turnout was 57% (in contrast to 75% among AB).⁵⁸

2.71 In *Electoral Registration in 2011* we also found a link between completeness and other socio-economic conditions such as occupation and level of deprivation.⁵⁹



Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

Tenure

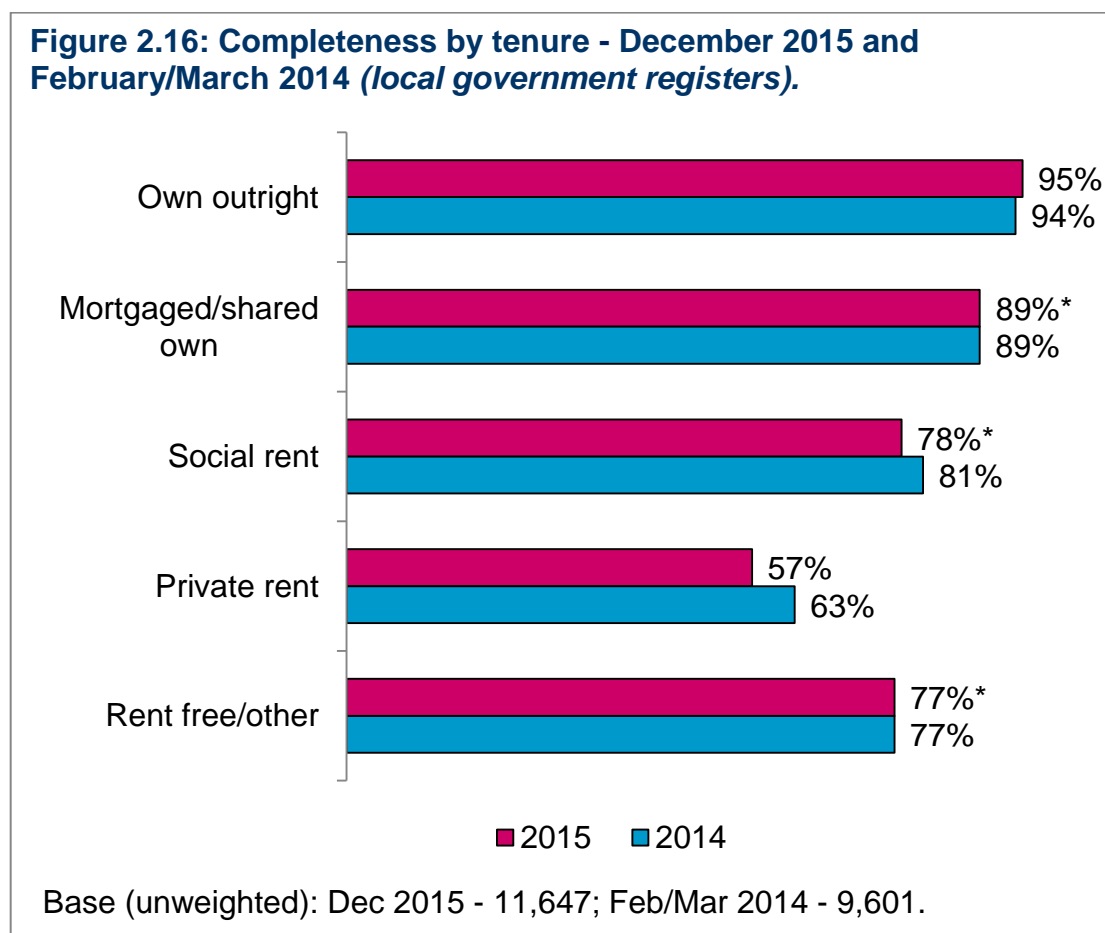
2.72 Tenure is a variable that has previously been strongly associated with levels of completeness. Confirming these previous findings, Figure 2.16 below

⁵⁸ Ipsos MORI, [How Britain voted in 2015](#) (August 2015).

⁵⁹ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014). Analysis of completeness in England and Wales found that those in administrative occupations are most likely to be registered (93%) followed by 'Professionals' (91%) and 'Managers and Directors' (90%). The lowest levels are among those working in 'Customer services', 'Care and leisure' (86%), those with 'Elementary professions' (86%) and those who are unemployed (76.4%). The study also found that completeness in the most deprived areas was 83% against compared to 91.9% in areas in the least deprived quartile.

shows that homeowners (both outright and mortgage/shared ownership) are more likely to be registered than people in other types of tenure.

2.73 There has been a statistically significant uplift in completeness since our last assessment among those who own their property outright, with an increase from 94% to 95%. In contrast, those privately renting have the lowest levels of completeness and the chart shows that there has been a statistically significant decline in levels of registration among this group post-IER transition.



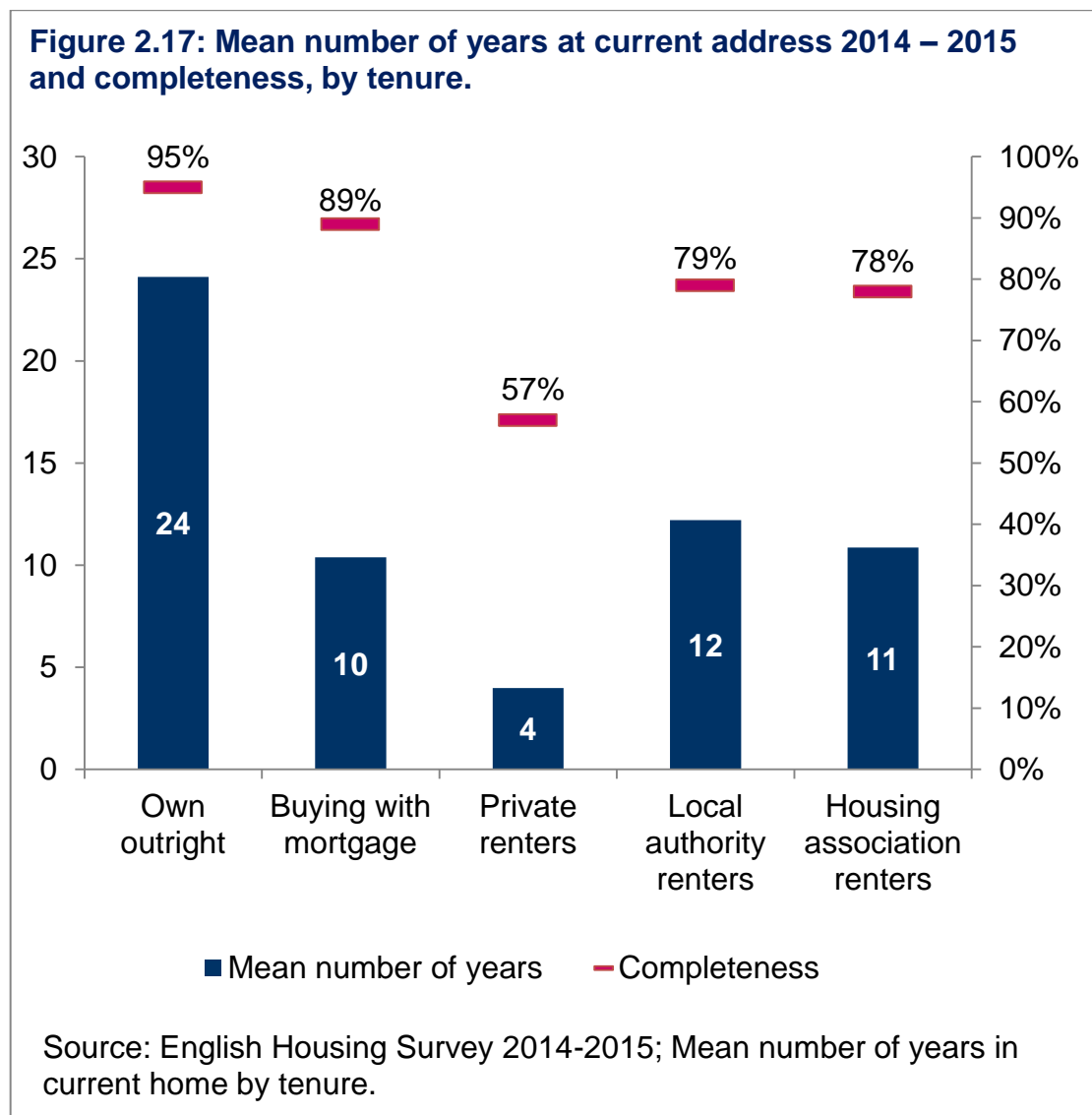
Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant. In 2015 the questionnaire differentiated between 'council rent' and 'housing association rent' while in 2014 council rent was the only option. Council rent and housing association have been combined into 'Social rent'.

2.74 Tenure intersects with age and mobility, as we have seen these both have a significant impact on registration. As outlined above, younger people and those who have recently moved are likely to have lower than average levels of completeness.

2.75 The private rental sector has the youngest profile of the tenure types: according to the 2014-2015 English housing survey, 48% of private renters

are aged between 16 and 34. In contrast 84% of those that own their property outright are over 55.⁶⁰

2.76 Private renters also tend to live at their address for a shorter amount of time than other tenure groups. As we have seen above, those who have lived at their address for less than two years are much less likely to appear on the register than long term residents. The chart below contains data from the English Housing Survey and shows the mean number of years occupants have spent in their current home alongside our estimates for completeness for each tenure group. This demonstrates the relationship between tenure, length of residence and completeness.

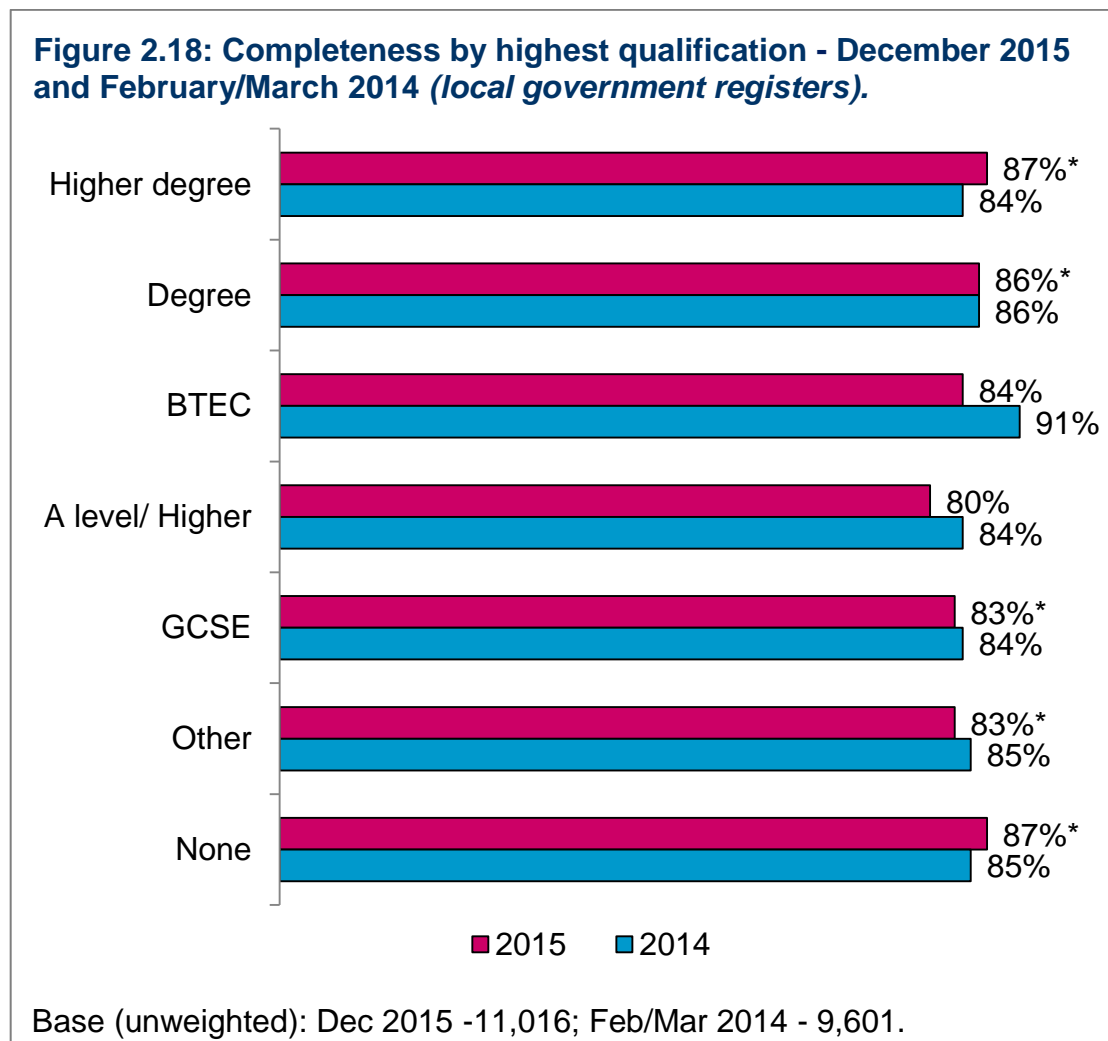


⁶⁰ The Department for Communities and Local Government (DCLG) *English Housing Survey 2014-2015*

Highest qualification

2.77 Completeness varies according to the highest level of education achieved. There are also some differences between the February/March 2014 registers and the December 2015 registers in terms of completeness by qualification.

2.78 As Figure 2.18 shows, the highest levels of completeness for the 2015 registers are recorded among those without a qualification and those with a higher degree (both 87% complete). In 2014 those with a BTEC qualification displayed the highest levels of completeness but this reduced significantly in 2015. The lowest levels of completeness are recorded among those with A-levels or higher qualifications (80%); completeness among this group has fallen since 2014.

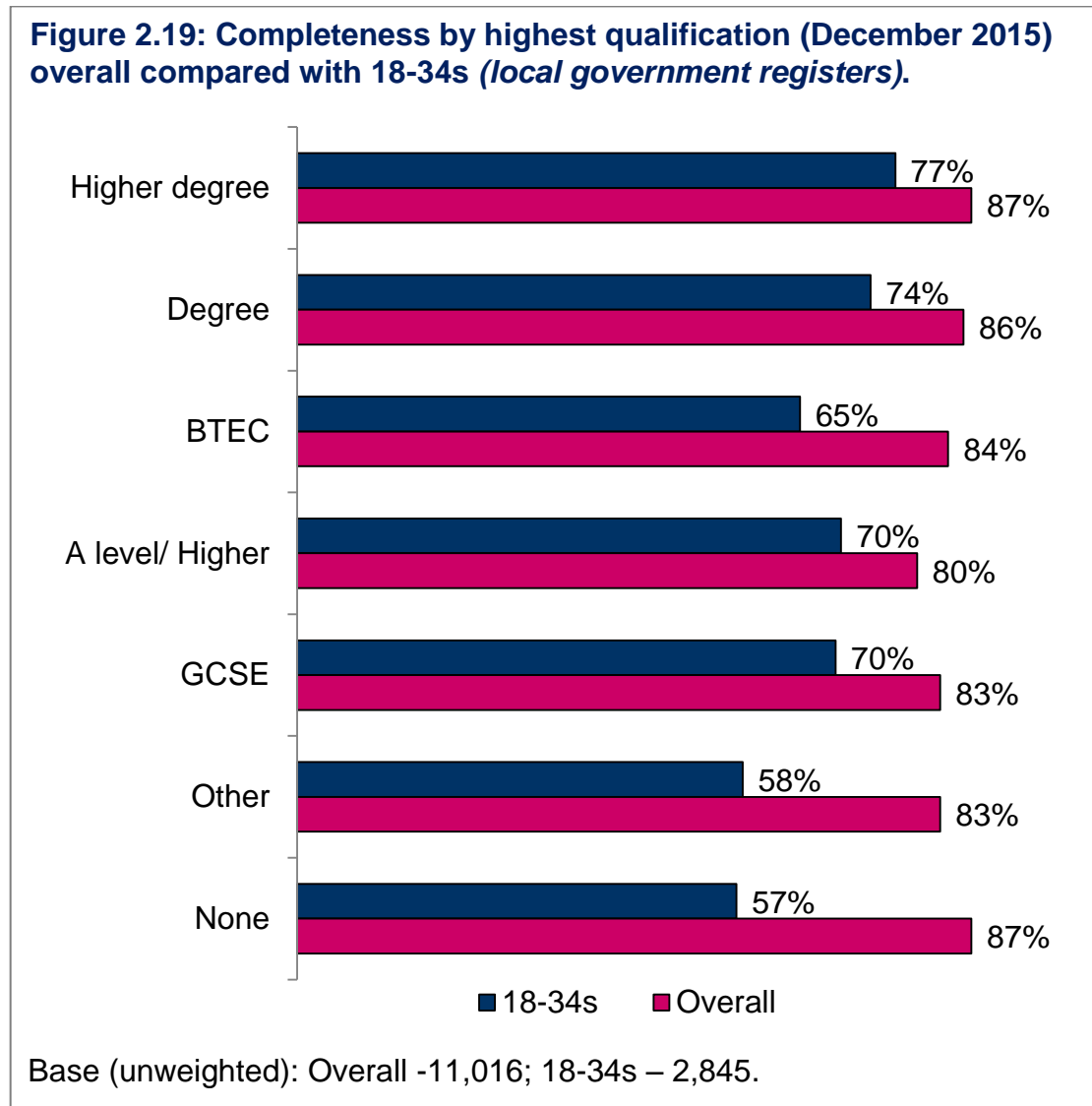


Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.79 Much of the variation in this area is likely to be due to age. For example, the higher level of completeness among those with no qualification is likely to be a consequence of the fact that this group tend to be older. Data from the

2011 Census shows that in England and Wales 53% of the population over the age of 65 reported having no qualification, compared with 11% of 16-24s.⁶¹ In the regression analysis conducted for this study, when other factors are controlled for there is no significant relationship between completeness and highest qualification.

2.80 As in previous studies, further analysis of this variable shows that within the 18-34 age category there was a significant variation in completeness by highest qualification: those with no qualification were significantly less likely to be registered than those with one.⁶²



⁶¹ Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census Analysis, *Local Area Analysis of Qualifications Across England and Wales* (March 2014).

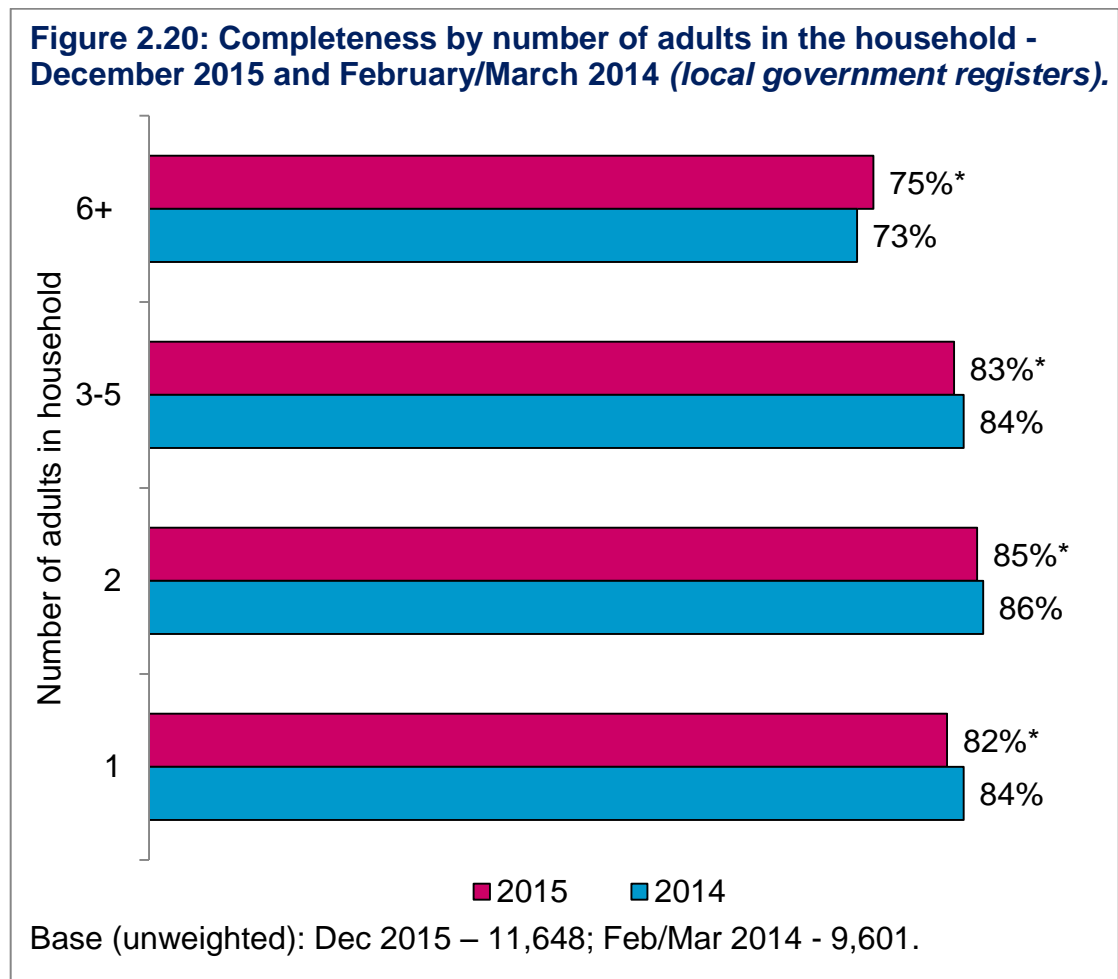
⁶² The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014).

2.81 Among 18-34s the highest levels of completeness are found among those with a degree (74%) or higher degree (77%); these levels are significantly higher than among those with no qualifications at all (57%).

Adults in the household

2.82 Figure 2.20 below shows completeness by the number of adults living in the household for the February/March 2014 registers and the December 2015 registers. It indicates that the pattern has remained consistent pre and post IER transition: two-person households have the highest levels of completeness. There is no statistically significant difference between one person or three-five person households but addresses where more than six people are resident record notably lower levels of completeness than any other.

2.83 Houses of multiple occupants (HMOs) have previously been associated with lower levels of registration partly because many residents can be there for only a short period of time. Residents in multi-occupancy properties are also likely to rent, the 2014-2015 English Housing survey found that a third (32%) of ‘other multi-person households’ rented privately with a further 22% classified as social renters.



Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.84 While the results show an increase in completeness among 6+ person households and a decrease in completeness among 1 person households these are not statistically significant.

Attitudinal and behavioural characteristics

Attitude towards electoral registration and voting

2.85 We have previously argued that mobility alone cannot account for the lower levels of registration among young people, renters and people in social class DE. For example, our analysis of population mobility presented in *Electoral Registration in 2011* found that young people are not only more likely to move, but also less likely to update their register record following a move.⁶³

2.86 In fact, low levels of completeness among those groups, especially young people, are strongly linked to attitudes towards voting. As part of our survey, we asked respondents about their views on electoral registration and voting.

2.87 The data presented on this topic is not nationally representative as it is based on the responses collected from people who were interviewed rather than for all those residing at that property. It nevertheless provides an interesting insight into the relationship between completeness and attitudes towards registration and voting.

2.88 As observed in our analysis of the 2014 registers, there is a clear correlation between attitude towards electoral registration and level of completeness.⁶⁴ Those who feel a duty or obligation to vote are far more likely to be registered (89%). For those who do not feel it is worth registering to vote completeness decreased since 2014 (66%, down from 74%).

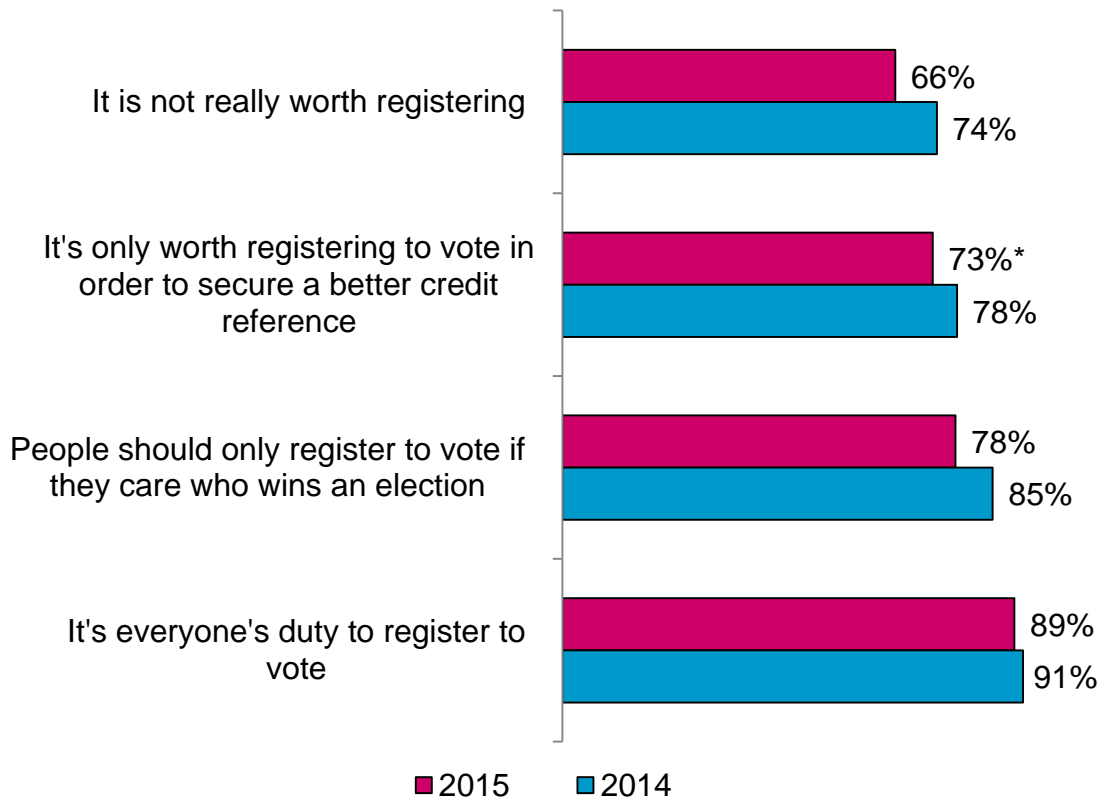
2.89 We also note a statistically significant drop among those who think that '*people should only register if they care who wins an election*', from 85% in 2014 to 78% in 2015.

2.90 Similarly those who feel it is not worth voting are also less likely to be registered: 90% of those who believe it is everyone's duty to vote are correctly registered, compared with just 71% of those who believe it is not really worth voting.

⁶³ The Electoral Commission, [Electoral Registration in 2011](#) (July 2014). In this report, we found the rate for those aged 18-34 is 17% but only 6% of them registered at their new address while 6% of 35-54 moved during the previous 12 months but 11% of them registered.

⁶⁴ The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014)

Figure 2.21: Completeness by attitude towards registration - December 2015 and February/March 2014 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): Dec 2015 – 5,716; Feb/Mar 2014 - 4,957. 'Don't know' excluded.

Question: Which one of these statements comes closest to your views about registering to vote?

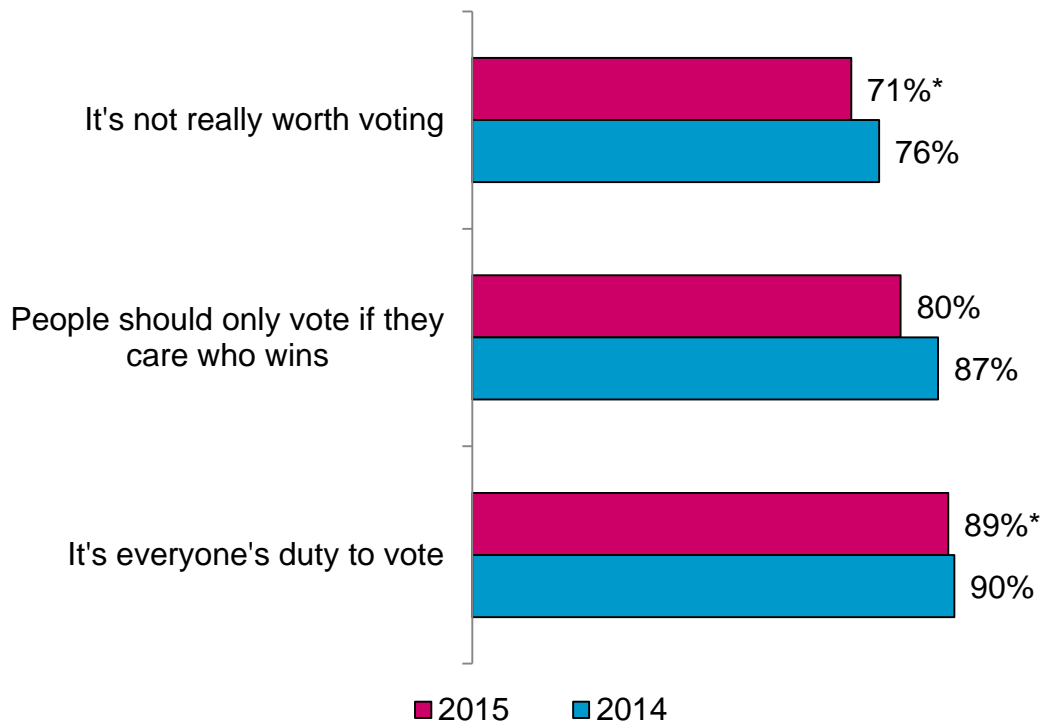
Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

2.91 The view that it is everyone's duty to register to vote and to vote is far less prevalent among younger age groups: 60% of 16-24s and 64% of 25-34s believe that it is everyone's duty to vote, significantly lower than the 83% of over 65s that believe this is the case.

2.92 Similarly those classified as DE are less likely than another social group to believe in the duty to vote: 65% think it is everyone's duty to vote which is significantly lower than the 70% of C2s, 77% of C1s and 82% of ABs.

2.93 Figure 2.22 below shows a general decline in completeness since 2014 across respondents to these questions on registration and voting, particularly among those that believe people should only register or vote if they care who wins.

Figure 2.22: Completeness by attitude towards voting - December 2015 and February/March 2014 (local government registers).



Base (unweighted): Dec 2015 - 5,748; Feb/Mar 2014 - 4,957. 'Don't know' excluded.
 Question: Which one of these statements comes closest to your views about voting?

Note: * Difference against 2014 estimate not statistically significant.

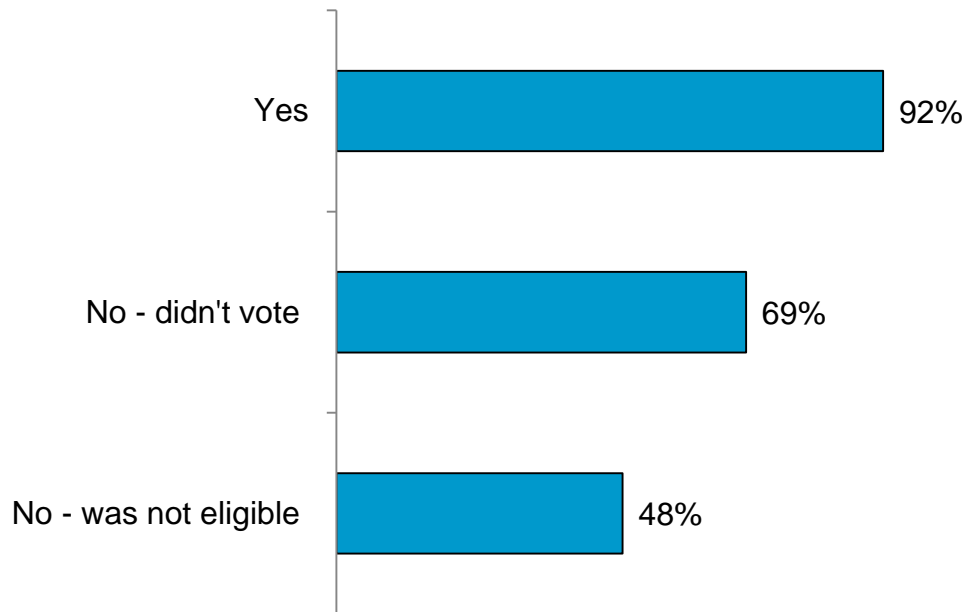
Turnout at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election

2.94 We also asked respondents if they had voted at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election. Predictably those who report that they voted in 2015 are significantly more likely to appear correctly on the December 2015 registers. This further demonstrates the interplay between voting and registration.

2.95 It also reasserts what we have noted above, that those groups that are typically less likely to be registered show lower levels of political engagement demonstrated by the fact that they are less likely to participate in elections. Our data shows that reported turnout at the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election is lower among, younger people, renters, and DEs.

2.96 These findings raise questions for Parliament about whether the December electoral registers, published around 5 months away from elections, should be used for the purposes of drawing boundaries.

Figure 2.23: Completeness by turnout at the 2015 UKPGE – December 2015 (parliamentary register).



Base (unweighted): 5,609. 'Don't know' excluded.

Question: Did you vote at the last UK Parliament elections that were held in May 2015?

Accuracy

2.97 Both the **parliamentary** registers and the **local government** registers for Great Britain were found to be **91% accurate**.

2.98 These figures indicate that levels of accuracy have improved since our last estimate conducted on the February/March 2014 registers which found the registers to be 86% and 87% accurate (parliamentary and local government respectively). This change supports one of the aims of IER, to make the registers more secure.

2.99 Table 2.5 shows the levels of accuracy of the December 2015 registers are broadly consistent across Great Britain although the estimates suggest that the Welsh registers are slightly more accurate than those for England and Scotland.⁶⁵

⁶⁵ Levels of accuracy for Wales are statistically significant in comparison with England but not with Scotland

Table 2.5: Accuracy of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain.

Country	Local government	Parliamentary
Great Britain	91%	91%
England	90%	90%
Scotland	91%	91%
Wales	93%	93%

Note: Base (unweighted): Local government – Great Britain 10,871, England 8,069, Scotland 1,421, Wales 1,381. Parliamentary – Great Britain 10,594, England 7,837, Scotland 1,388, Wales 1,369.

2.100 As has been the case for all previous studies on the accuracy of electoral registers, the majority of inaccurate entries are for individuals who are no longer resident at an address. Therefore it is not possible to collect demographic information about this group and we are limited in the amount of analysis we can conduct on the characteristics associated with inaccurate register entries.

Type of errors

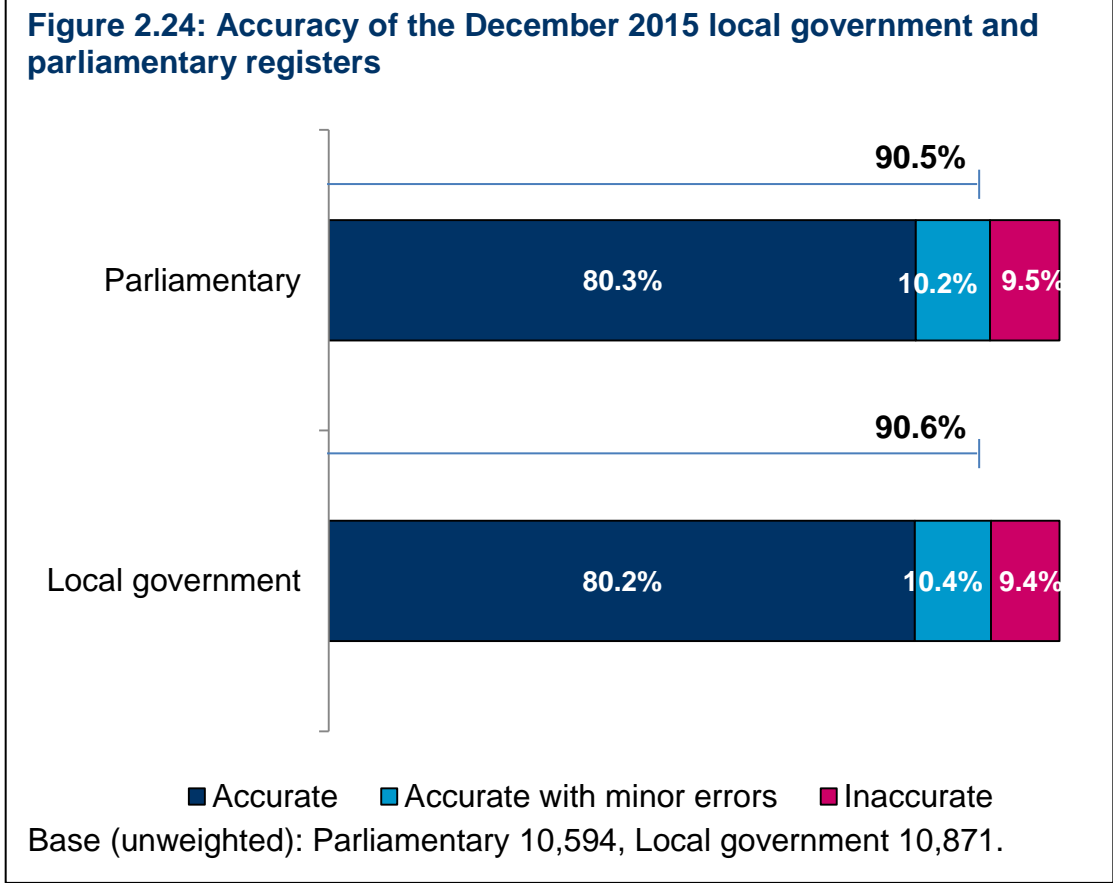
2.101 In analysing the accuracy of the electoral registers a number of different types of error can be identified. These errors are then categorised as either a ‘major’ or ‘minor’ error:

- The **major error category** is comprised of three different types of errors:
 - a) entries which refer to individuals that no longer live that address;
 - b) entries which may prevent an individual casting their vote at a polling station (for example, an incorrect name);
 - c) those errors that would mean that someone could vote when they are not eligible to (e.g. an incorrect date of birth for someone under 18).
- **Minor errors** are those which would not prevent someone from casting their vote (for example, an entry with a spelling error).

2.102 A breakdown of the types of errors used to calculate the accuracy of the registers can be found in Table 2.6.

2.103 Figure 2.24 shows the proportion of accurate entries on the registers along with those that contain errors: either major (which make them ‘inaccurate’) or minor errors. As the chart shows, 9.4% of entries on the local government register are inaccurate, compared with 9.5% of entries on the parliamentary register.

2.104 The proportion of inaccurate entries on the 2015 registers is smaller than that found on the 2014 registers where 14% of entries for both the local government and parliamentary registers were inaccurate. The proportion of minor errors in 2015 is consistent with 2014 at approximately 10%.



2.105 Following the transition to IER, the most common **major errors** continue to relate to register entries that refer to individuals who no longer live at the property: approximately 9% of entries on both 2015 December registers. There has been a decline in this type of entry, in 2014 the ‘no corresponding name taken at address’ error accounted for 11% of all entries. There has also been a decline in all other major error types, which when combined account for the overall increase in accuracy.

2.106 Table 2.6 below shows the types of error found on the February/March 2014 **local government registers** compared with the December 2015 local government registers.

Table 2.6: Types of error on the February/March 2014 and December 2015 local government registers.⁶⁶

	Feb/March 2014	December 2015
Major errors total	13.5%	9.4%
Major errors – (a)		
No corresponding name taken at address	11.3%	8.8%

⁶⁶ The categorisation of major and minor errors is the same on the parliamentary register – although some proportions differ.

Major errors – (b)	1.6%	0.3%
First name and/or surname wrong on register	1.2%	0.1%
First name and/or surname missing on register	0.1%	-
UK/Irish/Commonwealth marker present ⁶⁷	0.3%	0.2%
Major errors – (c)	0.6%	0.3%
Name on register corresponds to ineligible name on survey	-	0.1%
Attainers - DOB missing or wrong	0.1%	0.1%
EU citizens marker missing	0.5%	0.1%
Accurate with minor errors	10.7%	10.4%
First name/surname on register misspelled	2.2%	1.0%
First name/surname on register incomplete	0.6%	0.5%
Middle name missing from register	7.9%	7.8%
Middle name initials misspelled or incomplete on register	0.0%	0.1%
Middle name initial wrong on register	N/A ⁶⁸	0.1%
Person does not have a middle name but middle name on register (respondents only)	N/A	0.2%
Surname is/assumed to be previous surname ⁶⁹	N/A	0.5%
First/middle/surname in different order on register	N/A	0.1%
DoB earlier on register for attainer ⁷⁰	N/A	0.0%

Base (unweighted): December 2015 - 10,871, Feb/March 2014 – 9,446.

Note: Date of Birth (DoB).

2.107 The proportion of entries that present **minor errors** - those that would not prevent an individual casting their vote - has remained consistent with 2014. As in the past, the most common type of minor error is missing middle names on the register (approximately 8% of all register entries as in 2014). The proportion of misspelt entries (first name/surname), although small in 2014 at 2% has reduced to only 1% of entries in 2015.

⁶⁷ These electors should not have a marker.

⁶⁸ These categories were not recorded in 2014

⁶⁹ This assumption was made if an individual's first name matched and the surname they had given matched that of other members of their household but not the surname on the electoral register.

⁷⁰ Where the date of birth on the register is earlier than the attainer's actual birthday. In this case they would technically be able to vote in an election before they are eligible.

2.108 As shown in the table above, we have added a number of minor error codes to our analysis of the 2015 registers; as a result there are not corresponding estimates for 2014. Given that combined this type of error makes up less than 1% of entries this does not have an impact on the comparability of the results.

2.109 Levels of accuracy for the parliamentary registers are similar to those of the local government registers, although there is a slightly larger proportion (0.1%) of inaccurate entries on the parliamentary register, the proportion of entries with minor errors is slightly smaller (0.2%). These differences are not statistically significant.

Quantifying accuracy and completeness

2.110 This study was designed to estimate the percentage of the population not correctly registered and the percentage of inaccurate entries. Using these estimates, it is possible to further estimate the total number of people not correctly registered and the volume of inaccurate entries. However, these can only be rough approximations for several reasons.

2.111 Firstly, both the accuracy estimate and the completeness estimate are subject to margins of error (+/- 0.9% and +/- 0.7 respectively).

2.112 Secondly, related to completeness, it is not possible to determine with certainty the size of the population eligible to register to vote in Great Britain. Eligibility is determined by **age and nationality** (see para. 1.10-1.17).

2.113 Data from the Office for National Statistics, based on the 2011 census, offer the most accurate estimate of the size of the population. However, while annual estimates are made available which include data on age, they do not include information on nationality. Moreover, the accuracy of the mid-year population estimates is likely to decrease every year after the census.

2.114 Any attempts to calculate the absolute number of people not correctly registered at their current address is therefore based on an estimate of completeness and an estimate of the total eligible population. It can therefore only be an approximation and should be treated as such.

Completeness

2.115 Our previous estimate for people not correctly registered was 7.5 million although expressed as a range it was 7.2 – 8 million. This was in line with the one based on the findings for the December 2010 registers (Electoral registration 2011).⁷¹

2.116 The findings from this study suggest that approximately **between 7.8 and 8.3 million people eligible to be on the local government registers**

⁷¹ The Electoral Commission, [The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (July 2014).

were not correctly registered in December 2015. The estimate for the parliamentary registers ranges from 6.7 to 7.3 million.

2.117 Completeness therefore appears to have remained largely stable since 2014. The difference between the two ranges is due to a combination of the less than one percentage point decline and population growth over the intervening two years.⁷²

2.118 As emphasised in our previous reports, these figures do not mean that the registers should contain 7.8-8.3 million more entries in total. Those not correctly registered may still be included on the register but for instance at a previous address (inaccurate entry).

Estimates suggest between 7.8 and 8.3 million people were not correctly registered in December 2015

Accuracy

2.119 These estimates allow us to approximate the total number of inaccurate entries on the December 2015 registers: between 4 to 4.5 million on the local government registers. This is a significant reduction from the level of inaccuracies on the February/March 2014 registers, before the introduction of IER, which were estimated to have been between 5.8 and 6.7 million.

⁷² The overall population of Great Britain is estimated to have increased by approximately 980,000 since our last assessment of accuracy and completeness.

3 Individual Electoral Registration during the transition

3.1 As part of our research programme to monitor the transition to Individual Electoral Registration (IER) we collected and analysed data from Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) at each milestone of the process.

3.2 This chapter brings together data collected during the transition - from June 2014 to December 2015 – and, in light of the accuracy and completeness findings outlined in the previous chapter, **provides a final evaluation of the transition and an initial assessment of the new IER provisions.**

3.3 In relation to data collected during the transition, we have previously noted the problems we encountered in obtaining accurate data. We have limited our analysis here to data fields and areas where we are confident in the accuracy of the data.⁷³

Electoral register entries

3.4 During the transition the number of register entries fluctuated at different points throughout the period: entries decreased in December 2014 (at the end of the 'write-out', -2%), increased significantly between December 2014 and May 2015 (in the build-up to the general elections, +3%) before they shrank again with the publication of the revised registers in December 2015 (-4% against May 2015).⁷⁴

3.5 Overall the registers published in December 2015 at the end of the transition contained 3% fewer entries than the ones published in February/March 2014, the last revised registers published under the old system. The number of entries on the parliamentary registers then increased again, by 4%, in June 2016 for the referendum on the UK's membership of the European Union.

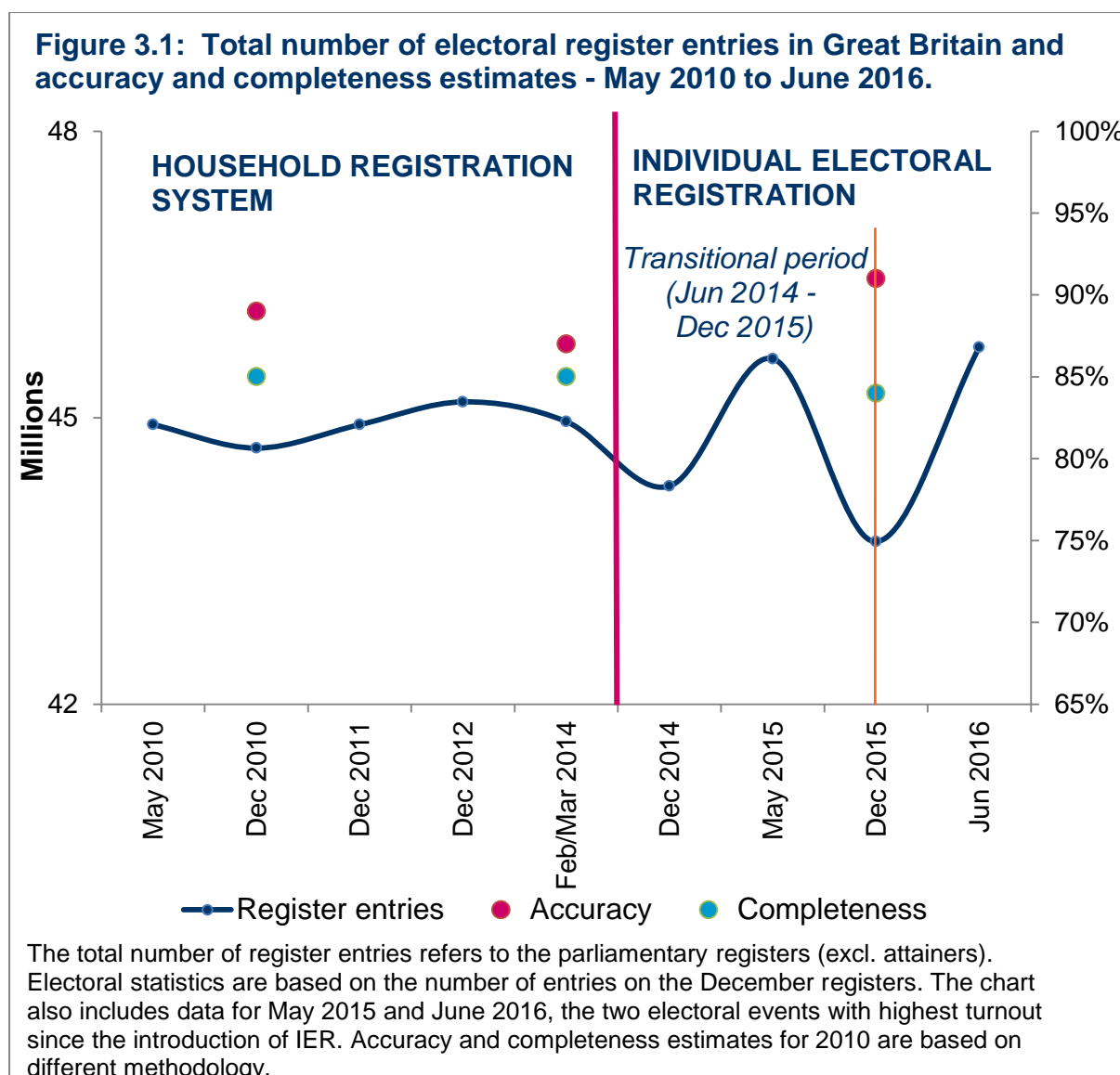
⁷³ During the transition, we experienced a number of challenges with the Management Information (MI) data generated by Electoral Management Software (EMS) systems used by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to maintain their register. The main issues were delays in the delivery of the data reports function (or failure to deliver at all) by some EMS suppliers, errors within the first versions of the reports which caused significant delays, and errors and inconsistencies within and across reporting systems. We also identified concerning discrepancies with other figures generated through the very same systems and used by other public bodies. For these reasons, we have limited our analysis to fields and areas we are confident in the accuracy of the data. More information on this available in our report [Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (February 2016).

⁷⁴ The 'write-out' replaced the traditional annual canvass in autumn 2014. During the 'write-out', electors not confirmed at the Confirmation Live Run process were written to and invited to pre-register by providing personal identifiers. This process, not comparable to the autumn canvass, returned lower volumes of additions and deletions. More information is available in Appendix D.

3.6 Data collected during the transition also showed significant variations across local authorities between February/March 2014 and December 2015, ranging from -14% (Oxford and Cambridge) to +11% (East Devon).

3.7 We have previously stressed that a reduction in the number of entries does not necessarily correspond to a reduction in the completeness of the registers and vice versa. For example, a register that increases in size may be due to effective registration practices taking account of population increases but may equally be a result of a poorly managed register which has become inflated with inaccurate entries. On the other hand, a reduction in entries may not affect completeness if the entries that have been removed were inaccurate.

3.8 Figure 3.1 below shows the trend in total number of register entries and accuracy and completeness. The findings from this accuracy and completeness study suggest the reduction in number of entries is primarily the result of removal of inaccurate records which explains why accuracy improved (up four percentage points) while the headline level of completeness has remained more or less stable, with a drop of less than one percentage point.



3.9 However, in relation to attainers, evidence from this study does, as expected, support what was also indicated by the total numbers registered – a drop in the proportion of attainers registered.

Additions and deletions: pre and post-transition

3.10 The register is a property-based database and, in order to maintain accurate and complete registers, EROs have to add and delete records for home-movers as well as removing entries for those who have died and adding entries for newly eligible electors (and those not previously registered). As population mobility varies across the country, so does the scale of the challenge that EROs face in maintaining their register and capturing home-movers.

3.11 The level of changes made to the registers and the interaction with the system are important indicators of the state of the registers and how well the registration system in general is working.

3.12 Overall levels of change throughout the year were the same pre/post-IER transition (the level of additions and deletions made in 2013 and 2015 are identical).⁷⁵ **This consistency in the volume of changes during the transition is directly related to the stable or improved levels of accuracy and completeness.**

3.13 Figure 3.2 below compares additions and deletions made to the register in 2015 against the ones made during the last year of the previous system (2013).⁷⁶ As registration is strongly linked to turnout, we also included figures from 2010 to compare registration data for the last two UK general election years and control for the impact that interest in significant elections may have had.⁷⁷

3.14 The chart breaks down additions and deletions made outside the canvass period (1 December and 30 June) and traditional canvass period (between 1 July and 30 November).

3.15 Under household registration most additions and deletions took place during the annual canvass period (80% of all additions and deletions in 2013).⁷⁸ As a result, in the lifecycle of the registers, the ones published at the end of the annual canvass were historically found to be

Most additions under IER (60%) were made outside the autumn canvass period.

Pre-IER: 20%.

⁷⁵ The 2013 annual canvass was postponed to facilitate the start of the transition (Confirmation Live Run process). The publication of the registers was also postponed and the registers were published in February 2014 (England) and March 2014 (Wales and Scotland).

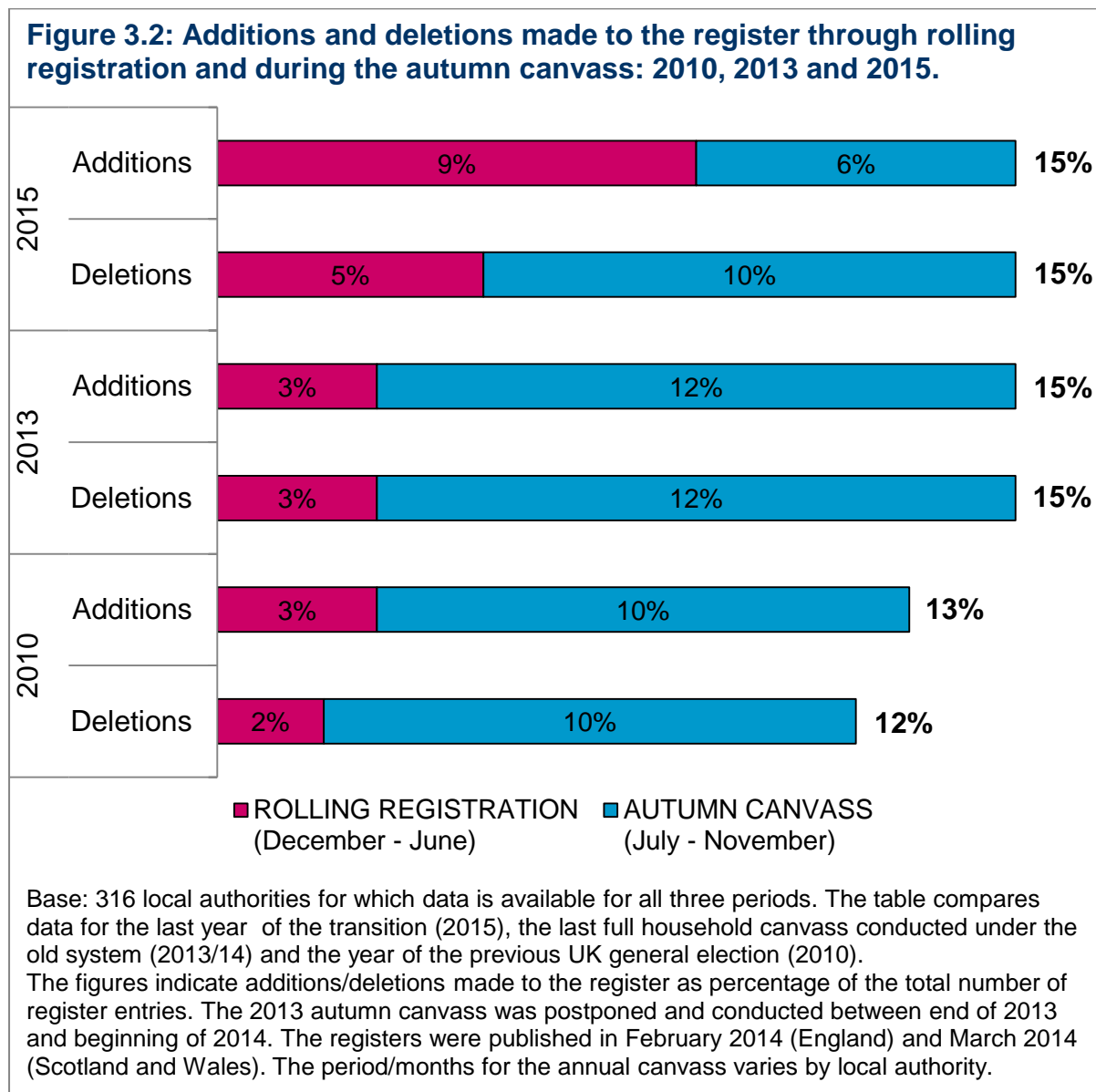
⁷⁶ Ibid.

⁷⁷ Data for 2014 is not included as the 2014 annual canvass was replaced by the 'Write-out'. During the 'Write-out', electors not confirmed at the Confirmation Live Run process were written to and invited to provide personal identifiers. This process, not comparable to the autumn canvass, returned lower volumes of additions and deletions. More information is available in Appendix D.

⁷⁸ The Electoral Commission, [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011).

the most accurate and complete.⁷⁹ The 1 December registers are used for the review of electoral boundaries.

3.16 Data collected during the transition to IER indicates the balance between rolling registration and the traditional canvass period was notably different in 2015. In 2015, rolling registration achieved a higher level of additions with the majority (60%) occurring outside the canvass period (the equivalent figure in 2013 was 20%). More deletions were made outside the canvass period in 2015 than in 2013 (33% against 20%), but the majority still occurred during the autumn canvass. The reasons for this shift are discussed at para 3.22-3.93.



⁷⁹ The Electoral Commission, [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011).

3.17 Additions and deletions can be a useful proxy for accuracy and completeness. For example, the fluctuations in the number of register entries presented above (Figure 3.1) are even more marked in areas with high population mobility and mirrored by the volume of additions and deletions reported by these EROs.

Table 3.1: Changes to the registers in areas with high population mobility (Inner London and authorities with high concentration of students) and in Great Britain overall.

	Dec 2014 – May 2015			Autumn canvass (Jul 2015 – Nov 2015)		
	Add	Del	Entries	Add	Del	Entries
Great Britain overall	8%	6%	+3%	6%	10%	-4%
Inner London	14%	7%	+7%	7%	13%	-8%
Student areas	13%	8%	+6%	8%	14%	-8%

Notes: ‘Student areas’ are the ten local authorities with the highest concentration of students.

3.18 For instance, data for the thirteen authorities in Inner London, areas with high population mobility and estimated to have some of the lowest completeness levels in Great Britain, indicates that between December 2014 and May 2015 the average volume of additions was 14% and deletions 7%. As a result, their registers grew by 7% in total. Conversely, during the canvass, 7% of additions and 13% of deletions were made during the autumn canvass and the December 2015 registers decreased by 8%.

3.19 The ten local authority areas with the highest concentration of students recorded similar trends: 13% additions and 8% deletions between December 2014 and May 2015; 8% additions and 14% deletions during the canvass.⁸⁰ Their registers increased by 6% in May 2015 and shrank by 8% in December 2015.

3.20 This means that during the transition the majority of additions were made at a different time from the majority of deletions: the first ones occurred in the build-up to the elections, the second ones during the autumn canvass. It is therefore likely that during the transition the May 2015 registers were at their most complete while the December 2015 registers were more accurate.

It is likely that during the transition the May 2015 registers were at their most complete and the December 2015 registers more accurate.

⁸⁰ These authorities are: Cambridge, Canterbury, Ceredigion, Exeter, Manchester, Newcastle Upon Tyne, Newham, Nottingham, Oxford, Southampton.

3.21 In the following sections we provide, firstly, an analysis of activities and changes made to the registers during rolling registration and then an assessment of the autumn canvass and other IER features.

Outside the canvass period

3.22 As noted above, 60% of all additions and 33% of all deletions in 2015 were made outside the canvass period. The corresponding figure for 2013, before IER, is 20% for both additions and deletions. In this section we consider whether this indicates a fundamental shift under IER, away from the canvass, and also look at some of the implications.

3.23 There was no comprehensive household canvass activity in autumn 2014, when activities were focused on confirming existing electors, and it is possible that some of the additions and deletions that would have normally taken place at that time occurred later (i.e. between December 2014 and March 2015).

3.24 Indeed, in early 2015 EROs issued Household Notification Letters (HNLs) to all their properties in order to address the lack of a full canvass in 2014. These indicated the registered electors at each property and made clear how residents could make changes to the register (if the correct details were not shown).

3.25 Figure 3.3 below suggests that the HNLs generated a significant response. They also did not require households to respond, unless there was a change to be made, or EROs to chase for a response and therefore struck a balance between prompting electors to make changes and requiring the commitment of extensive ERO resources.

3.26 As well as the HNLs, there are three other interconnected reasons for level of changes observed during the early half of 2015. Firstly, the **UK Parliamentary general election in 2015**. As previously highlighted, people register to vote in order to take part in elections and referendums hence interest in registration grew as the May 2015 elections approached. This motivation is also likely to have boosted HNL responses early in the year.

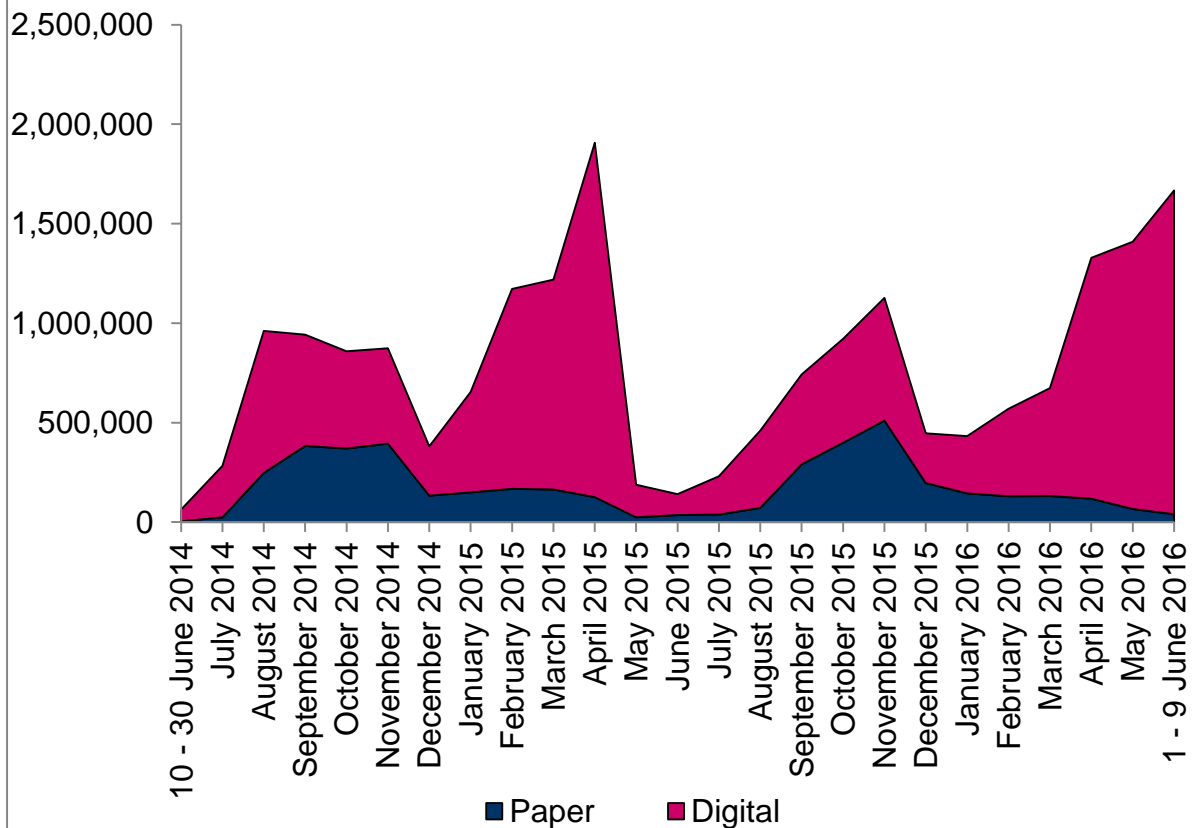
3.27 IER monitoring data shows that between December 2014 and May 2015 local authorities added 3.7 million electors to their register, with 1.6 million of these additions recorded during the five weeks of the Commission's public awareness campaign period alone (16 March to 20 April, the latter date being registration deadline). Additions made during the campaign period make up 25% of all additions made in 2015.

3.28 Figure 3.2 presents the volume of applications to register submitted since the start of IER and clearly shows this is higher during the autumn canvass and in particular in the build-up to elections (and 2016 referendum).

3.29 Applications peaked in April 2015 before the last general election and in June 2016 before the referendum. However, this high volume of additions was not recorded in 2010, when the previous UK Parliamentary election took place with a

similar turnout. Therefore the second, and possibly most crucial, reason for this increase in additions is likely to be the **introduction of online registration**.

Figure 3.3: Applications to register to vote under IER (10 June 2014 to 9 June 2016) - Digital (online) and paper form.



The deadline for registering to vote in EU Referendum was 9 June 2016.
Source: <https://www.gov.uk/performance/register-to-vote>.

3.30 Online registration undoubtedly made the application process quicker and easier to complete and it has been one of the most successful features of the new system. **Of all applications to register made under IER, 78% were submitted online.**

3.31 As highlighted in the previous chapter, young and mobile people are the most likely to be under-registered. As a result they are also most likely to need to register at any given point in time. Data from the online system shows that the majority of all applications, inside and outside of the canvass period, are made by those under the age of 35. During the 2015 canvass period, 55% of all applications were made by this group; similarly 58% of applications made in the run up to the 2015 UK general election (March and April) were made by under 35s.

3.32 Figure 3.3 shows that also during the autumn canvass, when paper ITRs are sent out as part of the second stage of the canvass, the volume of online applications still exceed the one of paper forms (applicants are given the option of returning the paper form or complete the application online). Despite this move to digital, people in older age groups do not seem to have been negatively affected: the completeness results presented in the previous chapter show that those in older age

bands are more likely to be registered now than before the introduction of online registration.

3.33 The immediacy of the online system, where an application can be completed in five minutes, also makes it easier to directly encourage people to register to vote. This relates to the third reason for a potentially more efficient rolling registration system: **public awareness campaigns ahead of the May 2015 polls**.

3.34 While EROs were undertaking activities locally to encourage registration, the Commission ran a public awareness campaign to underpin that work ahead of the 2015 UK general election. Some activities started in February with the main advertising running from 16 March to 20 April (the registration deadline). Our campaign was targeted at the whole of the population eligible to vote with a particular focus on under-registered groups.

3.35 The overall aims were to make sure as many people as possible who were not registered to vote did so by the deadline and to encourage people to register to vote online.

3.36 Our strategy split our audience into two groups:

- The **'incidentals'** – people who didn't realise they needed to register, or simply haven't got round to it. This group was likely to respond to an advertising message in the lead up to the registration deadline.
- The **'disengaged'** – people who believe 'voting is not for them'. This group was unlikely to respond to an advertising message from us and engaging them required longer contact from voices that are credible to that group.

3.37 To reach our incidental audience, the Commission ran advertising across television and online channels in Great Britain. To reach our disengaged audiences, we formed partnerships and ran activities with organisations such as National Union of Students, Association of Colleges, Universities UK, Bite the Ballot, Operation Black Vote, Muslim Council of Great Britain, Sikh Council and Hindu Council UK.

3.38 The combination of these three elements – the motivation to register as a result of the UK general election, the ease of registering via the online system and a concerted effort from EROs, the Commission and many others – had a clear impact on the volume of additions to the register. This suggests that, at least in years with high profile polls, the existence of online registration supports more effective engagement with the electorate than was possible before.

Duplicate applications

3.39 There is one notable downside to what otherwise appears to be a successful development which relates to the inability of an elector to check their registration online. In the absence of this facility, people are more likely to apply to register again to ensure they are correctly registered which explains why the number of applications received during the transition and particularly in the month or so immediately ahead of the 2015 elections is much higher than the number of additions to the register (see Figure 3.3 above).

3.40 We estimate that **a significant number of the applications made during the five weeks before elections (in 2015 and 2016) were duplicates.** Data collected from EROs for the period between 1 December 2014 and the registration deadline for the May 2015 elections (20 April 2015) suggests that almost a third of all applications (29%) were duplicates. The proportion of duplicates in the last few weeks and days before an electoral event is likely to be even higher.

3.41 The volume of applications, and particularly the duplicates generated in these periods, creates challenges for EROs in processing them all ahead of elections. In our report on the 2015 UK general election we recommended that Government develop a system to allow the public to check if they are already registered or not before they submit an application.

3.42 This issue of duplicate applications is also likely to have been a challenge in the run up to the 2016 referendum and further analysis on the issue (based on data collected from EROs) will be contained in our report on the administration of the referendum.

The impact of IER on the traditional autumn canvass

3.43 Household registration activity, including door to door canvassing, has always been the main method used to compile the electoral registers. Despite the move to IER, electoral registration in Great Britain is still designed around it and the revised registers are published at the end of the autumn canvass period on 1 December. These are the registers used for official electoral statistics and by boundary commissions for their periodic reviews.

3.44 As discussed above, the first full IER canvass in 2015 achieved a lower level of changes than under the old system, especially with regards to additions (Figure 3.2). In 2013, 80% of all additions and deletions were made during the canvass; the corresponding figures for 2015 were 20% and 60% respectively.

3.45 This may be because of the various factors discussed above but data on response rates for forms as well as feedback from EROs suggest a few issues stemming from the changes that IER made to the autumn canvass.

Statutory requirements: forms and a two-stage canvass

3.46 The current statutory framework requires EROs to contact all households in their area every year by post with any non-responses followed up by two reminders and a personal visit as required. The process should commence between 1 July and 30 November but all stages of the canvass do not have to be completed within this period.

3.47 EROs are required to use the prescribed **Household Enquiry Form (HEF)** for contacting households. The HEF replaced the old canvass form: this was necessary in order to meet the new statutory requirements introduced by the new system.

3.48 IER also introduced a **two-stage canvassing approach**. An initial form (HEF) is sent to all properties and the person completing it for the household should cross-off any entry for people no longer resident and add names of people eligible but not registered.

3.49 When the returned form contains a new name, a potential unregistered elector, another form is sent out: the **Invitation to Register (ITR)**. This asks the individual to make an application for registration, which requires them to provide their National Insurance Number (NINo) and Date of Birth (DoB). Individuals can also respond to ITRs by completing a registration application online.

Form response rate

3.50 Under the old system, response rate to the canvass was a useful proxy of the accuracy and completeness of the register: the higher the response rate, the higher the level of changes made to the registers which are then more likely to be up-to-date. In fact, historic data indicated that a decline in response rate corresponded to a drop in completeness: this was the case in the early 90s and especially in the mid-2000s when response rate decreased significantly and, combined with other factors, caused a significant fall in completeness.^{81 82}

3.51 Data collected before and during the transition (Figure 3.4 below) suggests that the response rate for the HEF, at 81%, is notably lower than for the previous household canvass form (93%).

3.52 We also see significant changes at local authority level. In 2013, 41% of local authority areas reported canvass response rate over 95% and only 1% below 80%. The corresponding figures for HEFs in 2015 were 10% (local authority areas with over 95% response rate) and 28% (local authority areas below 80% response rate).⁸³

3.53 The response rate for the ITR also appears low at 42% but that response rate does not include forms submitted online (through the online registration system) and given the level of take up of the online option it is unlikely that the level of response to the ITR is genuinely low.

Pre-IER, 1% of local authorities had canvass response rate below 80%.

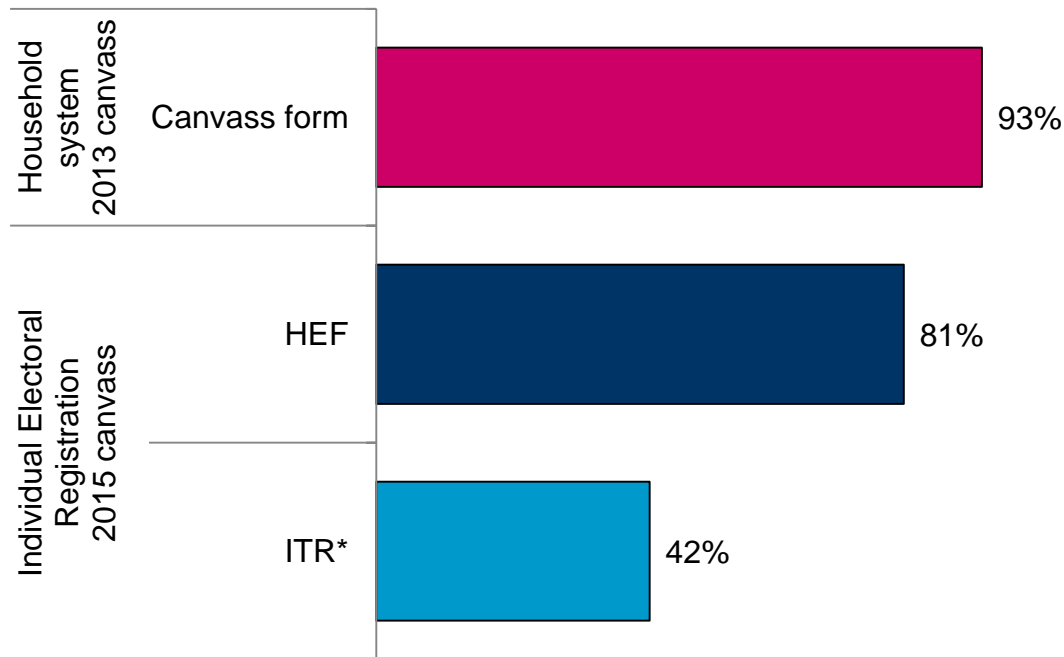
Under IER: 28%.

⁸¹ The Electoral Commission: [The completeness and accuracy of electoral registers in Great Britain](#) (March 2010); [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011).

⁸² The drop in completeness recorded between the 2001 and 2011 estimates is likely to have occurred in the mid-2000s due to a combination of three factors: decrease in canvass response rate, lowering turnout and increased population mobility.

⁸³ Base: 360 local authorities.

Figure 3.4: Response rate to canvass forms in 2013 (household registration) and 2015 (Individual Electoral Registration).



Base: 352 local authorities. Data for 2013 includes secondary checks.
 Response rate is for the autumn canvass period only.
 * ITR response rate does not include online registrations.

3.54 However, the lower level of additions and deletions recorded during the autumn canvass period is likely to be related to the lower level of response rate to the HEF. The HEF appears to be longer than the old canvass form (although it asks for a similar amount of information). It is also more likely than the old canvass form to be addressed to the generic ‘Occupier’ which decreases the likelihood of this being picked up by the people living in the household.

Implications and next steps

3.55 Although we cannot judge the overall response rate for the ITR, EROs clearly feel they have had to work harder and expend greater resources to achieve a response. This may be in part due to the two-stage canvassing approach with anecdotal evidence suggesting people believing that by returning the HEF they are already registered, leading them to ignore the subsequent ITR. EROs also reported complaints from members of the public who found the process bureaucratic and confusing.

3.56 We considered these issues when we reviewed and updated forms for EROs to use during the 2016 annual canvass. We added messaging to explain the purpose of each form, making clear that there are two stages to the annual canvass and that adding names to a HEF does not mean people are registered. We also looked at the design and ordering of information on the forms to make salient information more prominent and to help guide people through the process. We will continue to review and improve forms within the legislative framework.

3.57 Larger forms and a longer process also mean that IER has increased the costs of the annual canvass. Some EROs also expressed frustration at having to canvass (and get a response from) every property in their area every year when only a small proportion of households change residents.

3.58 Some EROs also indicated concerns regarding the requirement to ask for personal identifiers and the exceptions/attestation process for those who cannot provide them feeling that these elements also increased the length of the process and the resources required (more information on these elements can be found at par. 1.28-1.31).

3.59 A few EROs introduced new practices to address some of the challenges they saw in delivering IER. For example, Tower Hamlets was one ERO who equipped some of its canvassers with tablets and reported some positive results (higher response rate than those who canvassed with paper forms). Although we have not specifically evaluated this approach it may be a more efficient method of canvassing under IER.

3.60 Perhaps more significantly, Government has recognised the need to explore improvements to the mechanics and processes involved in registration now that IER has been delivered. Pilots will be run during the 2016 canvass to explore the impact of amending the current requirements on EROs, e.g. by removing stages from the canvass, allowing greater use of data and/or replacing HEFs with HNLs. We support the aims of these pilots and will publish our evaluation of them in 2017. A further set of pilots is also being planned for the 2017 canvass. The results of both these schemes may indicate some of the longer term changes that can be made to improve the efficiency of electoral registration in Great Britain.

Canvassing method and timing

3.61 During the transition to IER, some EROs did not complete all the required steps for contacting electors during the traditional canvass period ahead of the 1 December register publication date. They therefore continued to undertake activity after the publication of their December register. This is entirely legal and was in most cases a response to some specific issues with the timing of the canvass.

3.62 The approach also helped with addressing some specific IER challenges (so this is not specific to the transition period only). For example, the removal of the ability for the block registration of students meant that students needed to be individually contacted. Many students are not usually resident till late September or early October which leaves little time to begin and complete activities before 1 December.

3.63 However, this approach did mean that, at the end of the transition on 1 December 2015, some areas with a high concentration of students saw a significant drop in their total electorate with two areas, Oxford and Cambridge recording the largest drop pre/post-transition (-14% against -3% in Great Britain overall).

3.64 These drops did not indicate a significant problem with registering students in general but rather that EROs needed to conclude their registration activities after 1

December 2015 when students were resident (and also potentially more motivated to register with the May 2015 elections approaching).

3.65 This is further supported by the large increases in these electorates between 1 December 2015 and the referendum on the UK's membership of the EU, with Oxford and Cambridge recording significant above average increases of 10%.

3.66 This data, alongside the higher levels of change to the registers outside the canvass, raises a question about the continued usefulness of the 1 December register publication date for both electoral statistics and boundary reviews.

Other IER measures

Confirmation process and transitional arrangements

3.67 Findings presented in Chapter 2 found that the overall accuracy of the registers has increased between the start and the end of the IER transitional period (up four percentage points) and data indicates a significant number of inaccurate entries were removed during the transition which is reflected by the drop in the total number of register entries recorded during the same period (-3%).

3.68 An important contribution to this result is likely to have been given by the **Confirmation Live Run (CLR)** - between June and September 2014 – and the 'write-out' that followed.

3.69 The CLR was a transitional mechanism designed to transfer entries from the old to the new register. It involved matching existing register entries against the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) database as well as locally held data (such as council tax and others).

3.70 Electors who could be positively matched were automatically transferred to the new IER register. Those not matched, were required to register under IER, providing their personal identifiers so that their identity could be verified.⁸⁴

3.71 At the end of the CLR, 13% of records (approximately 6.1m entries) could not be matched and these individuals were written to and asked to provide personal identifiers (National Insurance Number, NINo, and Date of Birth - DOB). Individuals who failed to register under IER could be retained until up to 1 December 2015, the end of the transition to IER, and their entry would then have been removed on publication of the revised registers.

⁸⁴ Following the CLR, a 'write-out' exercise took place that replaced the traditional annual canvass in autumn 2014. This involved writing to all matched individuals to inform them they had been automatically transferred to the new register and did not have to take any action while those who were not matched were asked to provide personal identifiers.

3.72 Between the CLR and December 2015, EROs made significant efforts (up to 9 contacts) to ensure that electors still resident at the address the register entry referred to would have not fallen off the register on 1 December.

3.73 In total, almost 2.5 million entries (41% of the 6.1 million not matched at CLR stage) were removed between July 2014 and December 2014 while 2.7 became IER registered (45% of the original 6.1million).

3.74 On 1 December 2015, approximately 800,000 entries were removed as a result of the end of IER transitional arrangements: this equals to 1.8% register entries at the time and 20% of canvass deletions in autumn 2015.⁸⁵ Although it was not possible to estimate how many of these entries still referred to eligible individuals still resident at that address, evidence suggests that the vast majority of these entries were for electors no longer resident at the address the entry referred to.

800,000 entries removed at the end of the transition.

The main impact is likely to have been an overall improvement in accuracy.

3.75 Although we are unable to quantify the impact this confirmation process had on the quality of the register, evidence would indicate that it was positive for accuracy as it initiated a 'cleaning' exercise of redundant entries.⁸⁶

Personal identifiers and the verification process

3.76 One of the most significant changes under the new system is the requirement to provide personal identifiers (National Insurance Number, NINo, and Date of Birth, DOB) when applying to register. These identifiers are then matched against the information held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) or verified through matching with local data.

3.77 In our 2011 report we highlighted a low level of awareness of what was required when registering to vote under the old system and indicated that the provision of identifiers was not outside the expectations of a significant proportion of the public.⁸⁷ Indeed when asked whether they would be able to provide their NINo for official purposes, 95% of people reported they know it from memory or could easily

⁸⁵ The figure for entries removed at the end of the transition (800,000) has been updated since our last February 2016 report as we subsequently received the figure for Hackney which was missing at the time of publication.

⁸⁶ The Electoral Commission, [Assessment of progress with the transition to IER: May 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain](#), June 2015

⁸⁷ The Electoral Commission, Post-election survey 2010 (May 2010); Winter Tracker 2009 (December 2009) reported in [Great Britain's electoral registers 2011](#) (December 2011); In these public opinion surveys, we found that 77% of respondents thought that DOB was required to register to vote, 46% said signature was required, 35% said NINo was required (11% on DOB, 40% on signature, 41% on NINo responded correctly).

find it. In a separate piece of research, the majority of the public reported that a requirement to provide their date of birth would make no difference to their likelihood of registering (87%) while with regards to providing their NINo, 18% reported that it would make them less likely to register, 74% said it would make no difference and 6% reported that it would make them more likely to register.

3.78 The findings from the accuracy and completeness study suggest that there has been no significant negative impact from the requirement to provide these identifiers and it is likely to have contributed towards the improvement in register accuracy.

3.79 In terms of how the process itself has worked, data from the government IER Digital Service, which handles the data interaction between ERO and DWP, indicates that approximately 90% of applicants' details are positively matched against the DWP's database.

3.80 This means that one in ten either has to be verified via matching with local data, re-submit their details (if they made an error), provide documentary evidence or go through the attestation process. Figures in table 3.2 shows that the match rate is consistent throughout the country although a further break indicates that in London it is below that average (87%).

Table 3.2: Match rate NINo and DOB between DWP and information provided by applicants – June 2014 to December 2015.

Country/Area	Match rate
England	90%
Scotland	91%
Wales	90%
Great Britain	90%

Source: Cabinet Office, IER Digital Service.

3.81 Data related to the period May to December 2015 indicates that during this period 92% of applicants' personal identifiers could be matched. Among the 8% unmatched cases, 2% were registered through the other processes (98% via the provision of documentary evidence).⁸⁸

3.82 The data does not provide a complete picture of the outcome of the remaining 6% who were not matched and not registered through the exceptions processes.

⁸⁸ The data does not provide a complete picture of the outcome of the remaining 6% not matched and not registered through other methods. For example, it does not cover cases where the applicants re-submitted personal identifiers because an error was made the first time (for example, a typo with the NINo), where applicants registered at later time (period not covered by the data), decided not to proceed with their applications or were eventually found to be ineligible.

These individuals could have been registered as a result of matching with local data, have decided not to proceed with their application or have submitted an entirely new application.

3.83 Overall, the system seems to strike the right balance between requiring this information for security purposes and providing an alternative route for those who are genuinely unable to provide them.

Individual ownership

3.84 The most fundamental change introduced by IER was the end of the possibility of one person at each property (previously referred to as the 'head of the household') registering or de-registering all residents at that property. This had both positive and negative effects.

3.85 In the study 'Electoral Registration in 2000', the Office for National Statistics (ONS) found a strong relationship between registration of the head of the household and likelihood of registration for other people living at that address: an eligible individual's likelihood to be missing from the register was only 5% in households where the head of the household was registered but where the head of the household was not registered it was as high as 70%.⁸⁹

3.86 The ONS also analysed registration data for young people (18-31) living with their parents and somewhere else and found that those in the first group were more likely to be registered.⁹⁰

3.87 The move to IER means that each individual is now responsible for their own registration status and while this increased security, it may have had a negative impact on those not highly motivated to be registered or with a low level of awareness of registration.

Attainers

3.88 Completeness data for attainers (par.2.46) as well as the drop in the number of attainers on the register (-40% during the transition) indicates a decline in the level of registration among this group.

3.89 Before the introduction of IER we suggested that individual ownership could have a negative impact on the number of registered attainers who can no longer be registered solely as a result of the completion of a household form by their parents/guardians.⁹¹

3.90 They have little motivation to register when they become eligible: they cannot yet vote and there are usually no elections when the canvass takes place. This causes concerns not only for electoral registration but more broadly for electoral

⁸⁹ Office for National Statistics, Social and Vital Statistics Division, *Electoral Registration in 2000* (August 2005).

⁹⁰ Ibid.

⁹¹ The Electoral Commission, [Data matching scheme to improve accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers](#) (March 2012).

democracy as research shows that citizens who fail to vote the first time they become eligible are less likely to vote throughout their lives.⁹²

The open register

3.91 Electors are been able to opt out of the version of the register which is sold for use by marketing agencies and others. The Commission has consistently argued that the existence and sale of this version of the register (previously called ‘*edited register*’, now the open register) is inappropriate given that registers are not compiled for this purpose.

3.92 As a result of changes made under IER it is now clearer to electors, on forms and on the registration website, that they have a choice to opt out of the edited register. An elector’s choice as to whether to appear on the open register or not is also now retained for as long as that individual remains registered at that address, which was not previously the case.

3.93 Data collected by the Office of National Statistics shows that, in England and Wales, there were approximately 15 million electors opted out when the last registers were published under household registration (February/March 2014). In December 2015 when the first full IER registers were published that had risen to approximately 21 million (just over half of the electorate).

Is the current system sustainable in the long-term?

3.94 Overall, the results from the accuracy and completeness study, as well as complementary data and evidence, indicate that overall the transition was managed well with a notable increase in accuracy and largely stable levels of completeness.

3.95 Nonetheless, under-registration in December appears to have increased among some of those groups that were already less likely to be registered under the old system: young people and especially attainners.

3.96 While this raises serious concerns, data presented in this chapter suggests that completeness among these groups was higher in May 2015. In fact, most additions were made in the build-up to the May 2015 elections with the majority of applications being made by the under-35s. As the electorate for the June 2016 referendum on the EU membership showed an increase of 4% from December 2015, it is likely

Under IER, the link between registration and voting seems to be reflected into individuals’ behaviour, the way and time people register to vote.

⁹² Clarke, Sanders, Stewart & Whiteley, *Political Choice in Britain* (2004).

that completeness was also higher in May/June 2016.

3.97 We have always found a strong link between attitude towards registration and attitude to voting, with voters much more likely to be registered than non-voters or those who don't see voting as a duty. This attitude seems to be now reflected into individuals' behaviour and the way (and time at which) people register: with online registration, which made registering quick and convenient at any point during the year, people appear to be increasingly likely to register when they are motivated by forthcoming elections and referendums than several months before (in autumn during the canvass).

3.98 Although this will be, at least in part, due to events such as the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election, there is the potential for a more continuous system where registrations and activities to promote them are genuinely all-year round rather than focused mainly during the traditional, autumn canvass period.

3.99 Relatedly, some of the new provisions for the annual canvass – especially the two stage approach – have made the canvass less efficient and more expensive. However, regardless of timing, household activities remain important as the register is still a property-based database and some form of contact at a household level is likely to remain a key method for EROs to audit their register, review the accuracy of their records and remove redundant entries.

Without high-turnout events, additional funding and transitional measures, the system is unlikely to be sustainable in the long-term.

3.100 However, it is not possible to determine whether this trend identified during the transition will continue and if IER will deliver accurate and complete registers in the future as the new system remains untested outside years with high turnout elections/referendums. In addition, current plans mean that transitional provisions (such as the CLR) and additional funding for EROs from the government will no longer be available.

3.101 We have set out a series of recommendations below which, over both the short and longer term, we believe would improve both the efficiency and effectiveness of the system of electoral registration and which build on the overall success of the introduction of individual registration.

4 What next for electoral registration?

4.1 When we reported on the end of the transition to IER in February 2016 we noted that the current approach to registration, including the annual canvass of households, is unlikely to be sustainable in the medium- to long-term future. We highlighted then the need for an ambitious plan for delivering an electoral registration system that better meets the needs of people in the twenty-first century.

4.2 The research findings set out in this report reinforce the need to explore new approaches to compiling and maintaining registers of electors in the UK. Improvements in the accuracy of electoral registers since the implementation of IER are welcome, but it is clear that changes to registration processes have not had any significant impact on overall levels of completeness.

4.3 In fact, our analysis shows that while the proportion of people correctly registered to vote has remained broadly constant during the transition to IER, registration rates among young people, people who have moved address within the last year and people who live in rented accommodation have declined further since 2014. Even if people who are not registered are much less likely to be interested in and motivated to vote, as the evidence from this research suggests, these increasing variations in the registration rates of different groups should be a significant cause for concern for those who believe in democratic equality.

4.4 How should we respond to this increasing challenge? In the short-term, annual household registration activity remains the best mechanism currently available to support EROs with maintaining the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers. There are steps which EROs, supported by the Electoral Commission, should continue to take within the current framework to attempt to reduce the most significant variations in the registration rates among different groups. We set out below the actions that we expect EROs to take in the immediate short term to improve completeness among under-registered groups, and the steps which the Electoral Commission will take to ensure the most effective action is being taken by all EROs.

4.5 In the medium- to longer-term future, however, we believe that the process of compiling and maintaining electoral registers will need significant modernisation. We set out below our vision of a modern electoral register, and also suggest a number of areas where the UK Government should expand and accelerate work to examine how new ways of managing electoral registers could be delivered.

Action now to target under-registered groups

4.6 Following the May 2016 polls and the June 2016 referendum, EROs in Great Britain are now finalising plans for the annual canvass of households which will take place during the coming months. EROs are required to publish a revised electoral register by 1 December 2016, and this will form the basis for the registers for electoral events taking place in 2017.

4.7 EROs are best placed to understand the communities they serve and the likely implications of our findings on accuracy and completeness for electoral registration in their local authority areas. We have already provided comprehensive guidance for EROs for several years, including guidance covering the management of electoral registration services under IER and examples of approaches and tactics for engaging under-registered groups.

Recommendation

We know that EROs already deliver a range of activities during and outside of the canvass period designed to improve accuracy and completeness, particularly focussing on those groups in their areas that are likely to be under-registered. We need to better understand the impact of these activities, so that EROs can learn from the experiences of others facing similar challenges and develop strategies for addressing under-registration in their own areas.

We will work with EROs during the 2016 canvass period to collect evidence of the impact of specific examples of practices used to improve accuracy and completeness with those groups who are more likely to be under-registered. We will share the outcomes with other EROs so that they can adopt in their own local area strategies that have already proved to be successful.

The future: a modern electoral register

4.8 Increasingly frequent population movement, continued reductions in local authority budgets, and new statutory requirements for EROs have had a significant impact on the effectiveness and efficiency of current processes for compiling and maintaining electoral registers. We believe that significant change and modernisation will be necessary to meet the new challenges of maintaining accurate and complete electoral registers.

4.9 Our vision of a modern electoral register is one which:

- Uses trusted available public data to keep itself accurate and complete throughout the year without relying solely on action by individuals; and
- Makes it as easy as possible for electors to ensure their own registration record is accurate and complete, particularly ahead of elections and referendums.

4.10 The UK Government has proposed an important but relatively limited programme of pilot schemes to test variations to the current household canvass process in three local authority areas later this year. While we hope that these pilot schemes will provide useful data to help identify efficiency improvements for future years, we want the Government to significantly expand the ambition and scale of its planned development activity.

Recommendation

The Government should be open to new ways of thinking about how to improve the registration of electors in the UK, drawing on ideas from EROs and their teams, civil society groups and campaigners, and building on evidence about approaches used by comparable democracies elsewhere in the world.

We have previously suggested a range of areas for further exploration in our reports on the transition to IER, and we have welcomed the continued engagement of UK Government Ministers in this debate with the Electoral Commission, EROs and other civic groups such as the All-Party Parliamentary Group on Democratic Participation.

We now want to see positive action to develop new ways of compiling and maintaining electoral registers in the UK, in particular to enable EROs to make better use of available, trusted data to keep registers up to date. We believe it is time to move away from a system which relies on electors taking steps to register themselves, and instead develop automatic or direct enrolment processes which have the potential to deliver more accurate and complete electoral registers more efficiently than current resource intensive canvass processes.

We have set out a number of areas below where we think more work should be carried out now to examine in detail how future changes could be delivered, including the administrative, legal, infrastructure and financial implications of new ways of managing electoral registers in the UK.

The Commission is currently undertaking a strategic review of its future work and focus, and we intend to publish the outcome of that review by the end of 2016. We hope that the thinking set out in this report and in our strategic review will help to inform and support the UK Government's own work to deliver a modern electoral register.

More effective use of data to keep electoral registers accurate and complete throughout the year

4.11 Several countries have already implemented forms of automatic electoral registration to help meet challenges similar to those now facing EROs in Great Britain, including Australia, Canada and various US states. These systems enable those with responsibility for maintaining the electoral register to register electors automatically using reliable and trusted information from other public sources, or to update their details when they move without the elector having to "re-register" at their new address.

4.12 There is also significant potential for EROs to be able to use available data to further improve the accuracy of electoral registers, both by identifying and (where appropriate) removing duplicate entries where they are no longer accurate, and also by supporting a more comprehensive approach to verifying the nationality of people who have applied to register to vote.

Automatic registration of 16- and 17-year-old attainers

4.13 Currently, National Insurance numbers (NINOs) are allocated automatically just before eligible people turn 16, and a letter containing details of the NINO are sent to individuals at the address held by Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs. This information could be shared with Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), enabling 16 year olds who have been issued with a NINO to be added to electoral registers as attainers (who are not able to vote in elections until they are 18, other than in Scotland for Scottish Parliament and local government elections), provided that the ERO is satisfied that the individual is eligible and meets the residence requirements for registration.

Updating home-movers' details

4.14 The majority of home-movers move within the same local authority area (59% in 2011), which suggests that there may be potential for EROs to be able to use trusted sources of local or national data to identify where there are changes (or no changes) required to the register. People typically interact with a wide range of services when they move home in order to update their address details. Updates from trusted data sources could be used by EROs to change address details on the register without requiring electors to provide their personal identifiers again.

Confirmation matching

4.15 The experience of confirmation matching during the transition to individual electoral registration in Great Britain also highlights the potential to simplify the process by which electors' identities are verified before being added to the register. The extent to which information about potentially eligible electors collected during the canvass could be matched against data held by the Department for Work and Pensions should be explored in more detail. This could mean that fewer people would be required to provide their National Insurance number in order to register to vote. Confirmation matching could also help EROs improve accuracy by providing a further source of evidence about whether individual register entries relate to people who are still resident at addresses.

Identifying and removing duplicate register entries

4.16 The dispersed nature of the electoral registers across Great Britain currently means that it is not possible to identify duplicate entries between registers which are managed by different EROs. This means that some entries which are out of date (relating to people who no longer live at an address and have registered to vote at their new address in a different area) will be undetected and would remain as an inaccurate entry on the register. Providing a mechanism for EROs to compare information about electoral register entries across all 380 registers would help to further improve the accuracy of electoral registers.

Verifying nationality and other qualifying criteria

4.17 While EROs currently have powers to require applicants to provide evidence of their nationality before determining their registration application, this is largely carried

out on an exceptions basis where there are clear grounds to indicate that the applicant may not be entitled to be registered (or only entitled to be included in the register of local government electors). The accuracy of electoral registers would be further improved if nationality checks were automatically built into the application process, for example by comparing applications against nationality data held as part of the DWP Customer Information System. Other important qualifying criteria, particularly age, could also be verified in this way.

Making it easier for electors to register and update their own registration details

Managing registration details online

4.18 Online registration has been a highly effective new tool for capturing population movement outside the household canvass period. This has been at relatively low cost, particularly in combination with public awareness activity ahead of high-profile electoral events such as the UK Parliamentary general election in 2015, the general elections in Scotland and Wales in 2016 and the EU referendum.

4.19 The successful implementation of online electoral registration in Great Britain should be extended to Northern Ireland, and we are pleased that the Chief Electoral Officer and the Northern Ireland Office are taking steps to make the necessary administrative and legislative changes for people in Northern Ireland to be able to register online by the end of 2016.

4.20 Evidence from EROs suggests that a significant proportion of registration applications submitted using the online service, particularly in the period leading up to high-profile electoral events, may be duplicate applications from people who are already correctly registered. Providing a way for electors to check their registration status at the beginning of the online registration application process would reduce the action required by voters to keep their register entry up to date, and would also reduce the impact on EROs of processing duplicate applications.

Polling day registration

4.21 Data collected for the Commission suggests that, at each election, a number of individuals are told on the day of the poll that they cannot vote because they are not correctly registered. Our research with the public after the 2015 UK Parliamentary general election showed that almost a third of people wrongly thought that it was possible to register to vote as late as the day before polling day, and similar proportions wrongly thought that they would be registered automatically.⁹³

4.22 While it may not be an immediate priority, allowing eligible citizens to register and cast their vote on polling day would have the advantage of allowing people to register at the point when they may become interested and engaged with an election, e.g. during the few days before polling day, or on polling day itself. It would require applicants to provide verifiable proof of their identity, age and residence at

⁹³ The Electoral Commission, [May 2015 post-election survey](#) (August 2015).

the time of making the application, to ensure the ERO could be satisfied that they were entitled to register and vote in that election.

4.23 Polling day registration is currently offered at federal elections in Canada and in several US states.

Other use of the electoral register

4.24 Electoral registers are also used for other purposes, including determining the allocation of parliamentary constituencies and local government wards. They need to be as accurate and complete as possible at the point they are required for this important purpose. The organisations responsible for boundary reviews and constituency allocations should consider whether the registers published on 1 December each year remain the most appropriate for those purposes.

4.25 Given the significantly increased registration activity which has been evident in the periods immediately before the May 2015 elections, the May 2016 elections and the June 2016 referendum, the UK Parliament, the Scottish Parliament and the UK's parliamentary and local government boundary commissions should consider whether it would be more appropriate in future (ahead of the next scheduled review of UK Parliamentary constituency boundaries which will use the December 2020 registers) to base constituency and boundary reviews on electorate data taken from the registers used for elections instead.

Our future research

4.26 This report marks the end of our research programme to monitor the transition to IER. All our studies on electoral registration are available on our website together with most of the data collected during the transition.

4.27 For future studies we intend to use the registers published close to a set of scheduled polls. Currently, the next study on accuracy and completeness is planned for the registers in force for the May 2018 polls in order to provide an assessment well ahead of the next UK general election, currently scheduled for 2020.

4.28 We will keep collecting and monitoring data relating to compiling and maintaining the registers, focusing on the results of the autumn canvass as well as activities undertaken outside the canvass period.

Data collected throughout the transition has assisted developing methodologies to use data as proxies to assess the quality of the register, especially at local level as electoral registration remains a local practice and national assessment can hide issues in specific areas.