

Electoral Administration Bill – Fact sheet

Top line

The Electoral Administration Bill aims to make elections and registration more accessible for voters, while also introducing measures to enhance the security of our electoral system and improve administration.

Content

- Improves the electoral registration process for voters, in particular by enabling people to register to vote after an election has been called and establishing a new duty for registration officers to take all necessary steps to ensure comprehensive registers.
- Introduces new measures to tighten security, especially for postal voters, establishing two new electoral fraud offences, introducing a marked register of postal votes to prevent fraud and piloting the collection of personal identifiers at registration.
- Introduces a framework for the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) to improve the accuracy and integrity of electoral registers and support national access.
- Introduces measures to simplify administration, particularly for postal votes, and gives new powers to administrators to help them deliver electoral services more effectively and responsively.
- Promotes participation in elections, lowering the qualifying age for standing at election to 18 and simplifying rules for candidates and political parties.
- Improves information available to voters in polling stations, enabling returning officers to provide guidance in languages other than English and in a variety of formats, to help to open up elections to all people.
- Takes forward the majority of the recommendations of the independent Electoral Commission, which aimed to improve the convenience and integrity of our electoral system.

KEY MEASURES

Improving access and promoting participation:

- Enables people to register to vote after an election has been called (until 11 days before polling day).
- Establishes a new duty for Electoral Registration Officers to take necessary steps to ensure a comprehensive register;
- Gives Returning Officers a new power to promote elections and providing a ring-fenced fund for publicity and promotional activity.
- Provides for pre-poll information to be sent to all electors ahead of polling day, including details about their vote.

- Allows parents or those with caring responsibilities to take children into polling stations with them when they go to vote.
- Improves information available to voters by enabling administrators to provide guidance in a variety of languages and formats.
- Establishes a framework for administrators to review polling stations regularly to ensure that they provide proper access to people.
- Introduces a simpler and more convenient declaration of identity for postal voters, removing the need for a witness.
- Reduces the age of candidacy from 21 to 18.
- Introduces clearer rules for candidates and political parties participating in elections and reduces bureaucracy for smaller parties and independent candidates.

Enhancing security:

- Creates two new elections offences in order to provide stronger deterrents against electoral fraud. These are a new offence for supplying false information or failing to supply information to the electoral registration officer at any time.
- Introduces a framework for the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE) to improve the accuracy and integrity of electoral registers and support national access.
- Provides for pilots of personal identifiers (signatures and dates of birth) at registration to evaluate the security benefits of the policy.
- Introduces a marked register of postal votes received, similar to that currently used for polling station voters.
- Revises the offence of undue influence, enabling the offence to be effective even where influence has not led to any action being taken.
- Improves the security of ballot papers, replacing stamping instruments with a security mark and enabling the use of barcodes on ballots to help with the administration of lost or stolen postal votes / replacement ballot papers.
- Establishes a system of anonymous registration for people whose safety could be compromised if their details were published in the electoral register.
- Allows accredited observers into polling stations to observe the electoral process, and at other parts of the process, such as the count.
- Requires voters to sign for their ballot paper at the polling station to deter fraud.
- Increases the length of time available for the police to carry out investigations into electoral fraud.
- Provides for statutory secrecy warnings to accompany postal and proxy voting papers to deter anyone from unlawfully attempting to influence another person's vote.

Improving administrative effectiveness:

- Provides a new power for administrators to rectify clerical and administrative errors (such as mismatched serial numbers on postal votes) during the course of the election, and on polling day.
- Supports the administration of postal votes by enabling automated production of postal vote documents, including by replacing the counterfoil on ballot papers with a separate list to record ballots issued to electors.
- Introduces simpler and more flexible funding arrangements for national elections by reducing micro-management by central Government.
- Establishes performance standards to promote best practice in the administration of elections.
- Introduces a requirement for returning officers to submit to the Electoral Commission annual statements of elections expenditure, ensuring greater transparency and providing accurate data on overall electoral spending.
- Improves the nominations process, providing administrators with a dedicated period of 24 hours to check nominations before the publication of the statement of persons nominated and enabling administrators to correct minor errors on nomination papers.
- Gives new powers to the Electoral Commission, enabling it to fulfil its statutory duties to monitor and advise on electoral law and processes.

Secondary legislation

The Government is also progressing with a package of secondary legislation that echo the principal aims of the Electoral Administration Bill and form part of the phased and interdependent programme of Government reform on elections.

These measures will focus on improving the security of the postal voting system and are balanced with proposals to improve access to elections and administrative effectiveness. The legislation will deal with issues around how and when you can apply for a postal vote or a replacement, the process by which postal votes are returned to administrators and how postal votes are collected on polling day. It will also look at the issue of standard polling hours for elections.

These measures will be consolidated with regulations concerning access to and supply of the electoral register. Both sets of regulations will be subject to the affirmative resolution procedure. It is intended that they will be laid before Parliament in the near future to run alongside the passage of the Electoral Administration Bill. This will enable the changes to come into force in good time prior to the May 2006 elections.