

# Report on the Northern Ireland electoral registration canvass 2013

April 2014

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# 1 Introduction

1.1 In autumn 2013 a full canvass of electors took place across Northern Ireland. This was the first canvass to be conducted since 2006 when the last annual canvass took place. The purpose of the canvass was to improve the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register in Northern Ireland before elections scheduled to take place between 2014 to 2016<sup>1</sup>.

1.2 Prior to the canvass we gave a commitment to report on the overall administration and conduct of the canvass. This report reviews the planning and delivery that was led by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and provides an overview of the canvass results.

## Background

1.3 In November 2012 we published our report on Continuous Electoral Registration in Northern Ireland<sup>2</sup>. The report found that there had been a significant and worrying decline in both the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers in Northern Ireland.

1.4 Our research found that the completeness<sup>3</sup> of the April 2012 UK Parliamentary register was 73% and the local government register was 71%. The accuracy<sup>4</sup> of both the Parliamentary and local government registers was 78%.

1.5 We estimated that the level of completeness equated to approximately 400,000 people not included on the electoral register at their current address in April 2012<sup>5</sup>. The accuracy estimate indicated that approximately 270,000 entries on the register were inaccurate.

1.6 We concluded that the main reason for the decline in both the accuracy and completeness of the register was because the processes and systems employed by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland were unable to keep pace with either people moving house or becoming eligible to join the register. This meant that not all of those becoming eligible to register or moving house

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<sup>1</sup> Elections to the European Parliament and the new local councils in Northern Ireland will take place on 22 May 2014. The UK Parliamentary election and Northern Ireland Assembly election are scheduled to take place in 2015 and 2016 respectively.

<sup>2</sup> The report is available to download from our website at:

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

<sup>3</sup> By completeness we mean that 'every person who is entitled to have an entry in the electoral register is registered'.

<sup>4</sup> By accuracy we mean 'that there are no false entries on the electoral register'.

<sup>5</sup> This does not mean that the register should have been larger by 400,000 entries, because many (but not all) of those not correctly registered may still have been represented on the register by an inaccurate entry (for example at a previous address).

were being added to the register, and also that where people had moved from a property, a proportion of redundant register entries were not being removed.

1.7 We found that the data matching initiatives use by the Chief Electoral Officer had not fully compensated for a full canvass of all households in Northern Ireland.

1.8 We therefore recommended a series of actions to be taken by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland, with the support of the Northern Ireland Office and the Electoral Commission to improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers in Northern Ireland. The recommendations made in the report are set out in appendix B.

1.9 We also gave a commitment to further monitoring the accuracy and completeness of the electoral registers in Northern Ireland.

## Response to our report

1.10 Following the publication of our report the Chief Electoral Officer wrote to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland recommending that a full canvass of electors should take place in autumn 2013. In April 2013 the Minister of State confirmed that a full canvass would take place and that funding of £3.5 million would be made available for this.

1.11 In addition the Chief Electoral Officer commissioned management consultants, Deloitte, to conduct a review of the data matching processes used within the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI). The purpose of the review was to assess the effectiveness of the data received and how it was used to keep the register up to date. Deloitte was also asked to identify new public sector sources that could potentially be utilised and to review the arrangements in place for contacting the public. The review was completed in April 2013 and the report is available from the EONI website<sup>6</sup>.

1.12 The report concluded that the processes used to match the data provided to the EONI with the electoral register was both manually and time intensive and by its nature was prone to error. It also found that the data provided by the Business Services Organisation<sup>7</sup> (BSO) was of poor quality and required manually cleansing by the EONI. It also transpired that a more accurate database was available from the BSO that could provide more reliable data.

1.13 It recommended that the EONI revise its approach to data matching by centralising all of the data available to them. By developing a master database it would allow for a more cost effective way to manage the register and to get

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<sup>6</sup> <http://www.eoni.org.uk/Utility/About-EONI/Plans-and-reports>

<sup>7</sup> The Business Services Organisation provides a broad range of regional businesses support functions and specialist professional services to the health and social care sector in Northern Ireland.

more up to date information about individual electors. It proposed that the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) be approached to assist in the development of this recommendation.

1.14 At the start of 2013 the Chief Electoral Officer began preparations for an autumn canvass and took forward the recommendations to improve the data matching arrangements in place to manage the canvass.

## 2 Preparing for the canvass

### Legislation

2.1 Under section 3 of the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 the Chief Electoral Officer can make a recommendation in favour of a canvass of electors being conducted. It also provides the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland with the power to make an Order for a canvass to take place if he/she is satisfied that it is in the public interest to do so.

2.2 In December 2013 the Chief Electoral Officer wrote to the Secretary of State making such a recommendation. Over the following months officials from the Northern Ireland Office (NIO) worked closely with the Chief Electoral Officer and the Electoral Commission to ensure the necessary legislation was put in place for the canvass.

#### **The Representation of People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2013**

2.3 In order for the canvass to take place the UK Government introduced the the Representation of People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2013. The regulations included provision to:

- Design the canvass form
- Allow the Chief Electoral Officer to retain names on the electoral register for a period of up to two years
- Allowed the Chief Electoral Officer to supply limited data to NISRA to assist him in his registration objectives or for statistical purposes.

2.4 In our 2012 report we recommended that household registration activity should take place instead of a full canvass of electors. We made this recommendation on the understanding that the legislative framework for a full canvass at that time would require the Chief Electoral Officer to publish a fresh electoral register in December 2013. As such, all eligible electors would have been required to provide their personal identifiers (such as Date of Birth and National Insurance Number) when they registered to vote. Anyone who did not respond to the canvass would then be removed from the register. We stated that while this would have helped to improve the accuracy of the electoral register in all likelihood it could have led to a significant reduction in the number of people registered.

2.5 The Regulations allowed the Chief Electoral Officer to maintain a person's entry on the register for a period of up to two years provided he was satisfied that they were resident at their address and that their personal information had not changed. We welcomed this provision as a short term solution but recommended that the Chief Electoral Officer put in place plans to manage those people who had been retained on the electoral register. These plans should effectively target such individuals to ensure that they complete

and return a registration form before being removed from the register at the end of the two year period.

2.6 Following the review of the data matching process, run by EONI, the Chief Electoral Officer asked the NIO to amend legislation to enable him to share limited data with NISRA for the purposes of assisting in him in meeting his registration objectives. The Government agreed to this request and this was included in these Regulations. This new power played a significant part in the data matching process used during the canvass which is discussed in chapter four.

### **Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2013**

2.7 In February 2013 the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee at Westminster began pre-legislative scrutiny of the draft Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Bill 2013. The Bill dealt with a wide range of issues relating to political donations and loans, dual mandates and matters relating to justice. It also had a number of clauses relating to electoral registration that would:

- Remove the requirement to be resident in Northern Ireland for three months before being entitled to register to vote
- Allow those from Northern Ireland eligible to vote overseas to declare themselves as either a British or Irish citizen
- Allow those registering during the late registration period in Northern Ireland to be able to avail of an absent vote
- Make it an offence to provide false information on an application for an electoral ID card

2.8 The Bill received Royal Assent in March 2014; six months after the canvass began. Therefore many of the clauses in the Bill in relation to electoral registration did not apply to the canvass.

## **Design of the canvass form**

2.9 When conducting a canvass in Northern Ireland the Chief Electoral Officer must use a registration form that is prescribed in law for that purpose and the regulations provided for such a canvass form.

2.10 In February 2013 the Northern Ireland Office sought views from the Commission and the Chief Electoral Officer on the design of the prescribed form before it was set in the Order. Our feedback, focused on ensuring that voters had information that was easy to understand and that would help them to complete the form, was mostly accepted and included on the form. A copy of the form is included in Appendix C.

2.11 In his response the Chief Electoral Officer expressed some concern that the canvass form included a separate box in which a person was required to confirm they were resident in Northern Ireland for the three months previous to 15 October 2013. He felt that this had the potential to cause confusion and could be controversial amongst some sections of the community in Northern Ireland.



2.12 Outside of a 'canvass period' electors confirm they meet the residency requirement when they sign the declaration box on their form. However, following legal advice the Northern Ireland Office were advised that this declaration should be a distinctive part of the canvass form in which an individual would be required to confirm the residency requirement by ticking a yes or no box.

2.13 The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 removes the requirement of three month residency when registering to vote. Furthermore, it gives the Commission a role in the future design of canvass forms and other voter facing forms in Northern Ireland. This will bring Northern Ireland into line with the rest of the UK where the Commission is already involved in designing forms ahead of the introduction of individual electoral registration.

## Recruitment and training of canvassers

2.14 In March 2013 the EONI began a recruitment drive to employ 1,500 individuals to work as electoral canvassers. Payment ranged from £800 to £1,300 and was dependent on the number of households visited and the canvass area to be covered. The Chief Electoral Officer advised that a higher payment was available to those canvassers working in areas that necessitated car travel compared to those in urban areas where it was more practical to deliver canvass forms on foot.

2.15 In total 1,354 canvassers were appointed by the summer of 2013. Despite some initial concerns by the Chief Electoral Officer that certain parts of Northern Ireland could potentially have no canvasser in place this failed to materialise.

2.16 A total of 35 training sessions for canvassers took place across Northern Ireland between 17 to 24 August. The Chief Electoral Officer was of the view that training should take place as close as possible to the start of the canvass to ensure that information passed onto canvassers was fresh when they began to deliver forms. Two pilot training sessions took place in Belfast and in Derry/Londonderry which were observed by Commission representatives who provided feedback on the content of the sessions.

2.17 The training consisted of a presentation from the local Area Electoral Officer (AEO) and was followed by a number of role playing scenarios in which EONI staff explained how to deal with difficult situations. A question and answer session then followed. Feedback from evaluation forms completed by canvassers was very positive about the training with 96% saying the training was either very useful or useful.

2.18 Immediately following the training session canvassers were provided with a canvass manual, pre-populated and blank canvass forms, their ID badge, canvass bag and other supplementary materials.

2.19 During the canvass period canvassers were expected to make weekly visits to report on their progress. These meetings provided an opportunity for AEOs to monitor the performance of canvassers, deal with any specific

queries and to monitor overall progress. This process appeared to work well and no negative feedback was relayed to the EONI or the Commission.

## Supporting the canvass

2.20 In our 2012 report we gave a commitment to supporting registration activity through public awareness activity. We sought and secured funding from the Speakers Committee<sup>8</sup> to conduct this work upon confirmation from the Secretary of State that the canvass would proceed.

2.21 The overall aim of our campaign was to maximise the effectiveness of the canvass and help increase the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. Our specific campaign objectives were:

- To encourage people to accurately complete and return their canvass form
- To ensure all electors knew how to return their canvass form and by when
- To ensure all electors knew where to go to find out more information if they needed it

2.22 In order to reach the maximum number of people in an efficient manner, we used TV, radio, press, online and outdoor advertising. We produced new creative specifically designed for the canvass and all filming and photography took place in Northern Ireland. Our TV advert can be viewed at: [www.youtube.com/user/ElectoralCommission1](http://www.youtube.com/user/ElectoralCommission1)

2.23 During the creative testing for our campaign it became apparent that there were low levels of awareness on how to complete an electoral registration form. This was not surprising given that many people would not have completed such a form since the last annual canvass in 2006. Some young people also highlighted that they had registered to vote as part of the EONI schools initiative<sup>9</sup> and therefore knew little about how to get themselves registered or change their details.

2.24 In order to mitigate against any difficulties in completing the form we produced an A5 leaflet that explained what the canvass was about and how to complete the form. The Chief Electoral Officer agreed to include the leaflet in registration packs delivered by canvassers during the first phase of the canvass.

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<sup>8</sup> The Speaker's Committee at Westminster were responsible for approving the funding for such expenditure.

<sup>9</sup> Post primary schools are a specified body which can provide information to the Chief Electoral Officer for the purposes of maintaining the electoral register. The Chief Electoral Officer uses this information to visit schools and get attainments to register to vote and apply for an electoral identity card.

# 3 Running the canvass

## How the canvass would be conducted

3.1 The Chief Electoral Officer confirmed to the Commission in early 2013 that he intended to adopt a three phased approach to the canvass that would commence at the end of August 2013.

### Phase one

3.2 Canvassers were to call at all households across Northern Ireland from 24 August – 21 September and hand-deliver registration packs which included registration forms pre-populated with the intended recipient's name and address, where known. Canvassers were expected to make contact with every household and either hand over the pack or post it through the letterbox.

3.3 The Chief Electoral Officer saw this as the phase that would have the highest profile of the canvass and pushed the deadline of 27 September for the return of registration forms. Canvassers were also expected to conduct a property audit of all households visited to ensure that the EONI property database could be updated.

3.4 We supported this phase of the campaign by launching our public awareness campaign just as canvassers began to deliver forms. This included a large scale multimedia advertising campaign for the first two weeks of the canvass followed up by further activity in the run up to the deadline of 27 September.

### Phase two

3.5 From 5-19 October canvassers re-visited households where no returns had been made and encouraged people to complete their electoral registration form. If no contact was made, a new pack was placed through the letterbox. Canvassers were not expected to make a return visit to households that they could not make contact with. The deadline for the return of forms in this phase was 23 October.

3.6 We supported this phase with a follow-up campaign telling people who had not returned their canvass form that it was not too late to do so by encouraging them to complete and return their form immediately.

### Phase three

3.7 On 5 November a mailshot was delivered by Royal Mail to every household where no response had been received and to those individuals on the electoral register who had not responded to the canvass. The mailshot included a covering letter encouraging individuals to register to vote and a canvass form. The deadline for the receipt of forms was 18 November.

3.8 Following this the Chief Electoral Officer utilised a data matching process to ensure he had a complete and accurate register. This is discussed in more detail in the next chapter.

3.9 We did not run any activity during this final phase as we anticipated that the number of people that needed to respond at this stage should have reduced significantly. In addition the mailshot was specifically targeted to individuals and households who had not responded.

## Household visits

3.10 Canvassers called to every household in Northern Ireland delivering registration packs and were expected to speak to a member of the household and ask for confirmation that those registered at the address were still present there. They also asked if there were any other individuals eligible to vote in the household. In the event of receiving no answer canvassers posted pre-populated registration packs for those on the register and a pack with two blank forms. Canvassers were also asked to complete a property audit in which they recorded details of properties that were not on the EONI database.

3.11 Canvassers completed visits in the first phase of the canvass on 21 September. In total they visited 774,502 homes and at least one form was received from 483,865 households by 27 September deadline. The three constituencies with the largest non-response rate at this point were Belfast South (23,991), Fermanagh and South Tyrone (21,882) and Belfast North (20,709).

3.12 During the second phase canvassers revisited the 290,637 households where no response had been received. Responses were then received from just under 80,000 households.

## Helpline and website enquiries

3.13 The canvass was supported by a helpline which was operated by the EONI. As with previous public awareness campaigns the Commission provided funding for additional helpline staff to deal with the number of increased calls to the helpline that were created as a result of the canvass and our advertising.

3.14 The helpline received a large volume of calls, particularly at the start of each phase of the canvass. From the start of phase one of the canvass (26 August) to the end of phase three (18 November) the helpline received 37,756 calls. Just over 19,000 of these calls was made during the first phase of the canvass and the busiest period was following the mailout in the third phase when 7,801 calls were made in one week.

**Table 1: Enquires made to EONI helpline 26 August – 22 November 2013**

<b>Nature of call</b>	<b>Number of calls</b>
Registration form request	5,325
How to complete form	6,513
Residency enquiry	1,688
Eligibility enquiry	340
Do not want to register	80
Other registration enquiry	13,021
Electoral ID card enquiry	1,726
Absent vote enquiry	249
Credit enquiry	147
Location of Area Office	96
Miscellaneous	1,089
Complaint	138
Transfer	838
Hangup/wrong number	241

3.15 The campaign was also supported by online activity on the Commission's voter facing website [www.aboutmyvote.co.uk](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk). The site provided information on the canvass and how to complete the form. During phase one and two of the canvass a total of 16,436 users in Northern Ireland visited the site and 945 canvass forms were downloaded. The EONI did not keep a record of the total number of forms downloaded from its website during the canvass but confirmed that there were 29,917 visits to the site during the canvass period.

3.16 Research on our public awareness campaign found that three out of four adults (17+) saw or heard at least one element of the campaign. The campaign was successful in communicating the message of the need to register to vote. Almost nine in ten of those who saw our advertising agreed that it clearly told them what they needed to do to register, while eight in ten said that the advertising made it seem easy to register to vote.

## Complaints

### Three month residency

3.17 As canvass forms began to return to the EONI it became apparent that the three month residency requirement confirmation box on the canvass form was an issue for some voters.

3.18 Although no exact record was kept by the EONI we were advised that approximately 20% of canvass forms were returned because information was missing. In most cases this was because the residency tick box had not been completed.

3.19 One newspaper speculated that the reason for the high level of returns may have been because of the use of the term 'Northern Ireland' in the

residency section. It suggested that this may have been unacceptable to some sections of the community.

3.20 Sinn Féin also expressed its dissatisfaction to both the Commission and the Chief Electoral Officer on the terminology used in the residency section of the canvass form and suggested that it could disenfranchise a proportion of the community.

3.21 Whilst we acknowledge that the terminology used could have created an issue for some sections of the community our own observations and feedback from EONI staff suggest that difficulties with the residency section of the form were a problem for a broad spectrum of people across all sections of the community in Northern Ireland. For many people it was unclear if a period away from home due to a holiday or for business reasons meant they couldn't confirm the residency requirement while for others it appeared to be a simple oversight.

3.22 As highlighted earlier the Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 includes a provision to remove the three month residency requirement when registering to vote in Northern Ireland. This will ensure that such problems will not be repeated in the future.

### **Canvassers**

3.23 The EONI received a total of 106 complaints from the public about canvassers. These were about such things as the time that canvassers called at or that the person was unhappy with the canvasser's attitude. The Chief Electoral Officer advised the Commission that he was generally satisfied with the overall conduct of canvassers and felt that most had done a good job. He said that the small number of complaints indicated that the training had worked well and that the weekly visits between canvassers and EONI staff were also beneficial.

## 4 Return of canvass forms and data matching

4.1 Each Area Electoral Office was responsible for the processing of canvass forms within the constituencies that they operated. Commission observers noted that practices varied in some offices on how forms were processed but generally they were all successful in processing forms as quickly as possible. The Chief Electoral Officer confirmed to the Commission that the maximum staff capacity was utilised in each Area Electoral Office.

4.2 Over 50% of the eligible electorate were added to the electoral register following the first phase of the canvass and the figure increased to over one million following the second phase in October. Area Electoral Offices issued 257,929 letters to electors who had not responded to the canvass at this point and sent a further 108,327 letters to households where no response had been made. As a result of this an additional 122,000 people were added to the register.

**Table 2: Number of people added to the electoral register after each phase of the 2013 canvass**

Phase	Number of people added to register	Total number of people on register
1. August/September	794,178	794,178
2. October	212,263	1,006,441
3. November	122,625	1,129,066

### Data matching

4.3 Following the third phase of the canvass the Chief Electoral Officer utilised the power he had under the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2013 to retain entries on the electoral register. To achieve this he worked closely with the Northern Ireland Statistics and Research Agency (NISRA) to setup a data matching process that could effectively identify people that had been on the previous electoral register and were still entitled to be on the electoral register that was to be published in December 2013.

4.4 Entries on the electoral register were matched against two databases available to the Chief Electoral Officer, namely the Department of Works and Pension database for Northern Ireland and data from the Business Service Organisation (BSO). 'Matchkeys' were developed that were used to identify an individual between the two data sources and the electoral register. These 'Matchkeys' also addressed any inconsistencies or discrepancies that may exist about that individual on the different data sources. If a non-respondent to the canvass who had been previously registered could be matched to one of

these databases using these 'Matchkeys' then the Chief Electoral Officer would retain their entry on the register if he was satisfied with the match. A full explanation of the data matching process is included in Appendix D.

#### **Department for Works and Pensions data**

4.5 The Department for Works and Pensions (DWP) has established a Customer Information System (CIS) database containing details of citizens and residents of the UK who have been issued with a National Insurance Number. It has in excess of 100 million records (including the deceased). Data for Northern Ireland is extracted and provided to the EONI for the purpose of maintaining the electoral register for everyone aged 16 and over. The data includes the National Insurance number, forename, surname, address, postcode and date of birth for all people with a Northern Ireland postcode that are currently 'live' on the CIS. A total of 1,204,234 people's National Insurance Numbers could be matched to one of the 1,254,123 entries on the electoral register at the end of August 2013.

#### **Business Service Organisation (BSO)**

4.6 The NHS Patient Register or Health Card Register contains a record for every person who is registered with a NHS General Practitioner in Northern Ireland. The data provided to the EONI includes the following information on everyone aged 16 and over; a reference number, forename, surname, gender, address, postcode, date of birth, date of death (where applicable) and a Unique Property Reference Number (UPRN).

#### **Retaining entries on the new register**

4.7 An example of how this part of the data match worked in practice is included in Appendix D. Using the national insurance number and the "Matchkeys" 97.4% of entries on the electoral register in August 2013 could be matched to the DWP data and 96.2% of entries could be matched to the BSO data. In total 94% of people on the register were matched to the two sources and 4.7% to one of them. This meant that almost all individuals on the electoral register could be linked to at least one data matching source with a high degree of precision.

4.8 Following this process the information collected was then used to assess if an individual, who had been registered prior to the canvass but who did not return a canvass form, could be retained on the electoral register. Given the high levels of precision in the match between the register and the DWP and BSO data the Chief Electoral Officer decided that an entry could be retained if the address on the electoral register published on 2 September could be matched with that on one of the two data sources.

4.9 The Chief Electoral Officer established a set of nine data permutations to be used to make a decision on whether a person could be retained on the register. These are outlined in Appendix E with examples. In total 147,008 names went through this process of which 112,013 were retained on the register as a result of these checks.



# 5 The new register

## Headline statistics

5.1 On 2 December 2013 the new electoral register was published by the Chief Electoral Officer. It contained a total of 1,241,079 entries representing approximately 88.3% of the eligible electorate. For the purposes of assessing levels of registration this report assumes that, at the conclusion of the canvass, the register had a very high level of accuracy, i.e. nearly everyone on the register was registered at their correct, current address.<sup>10</sup>

5.2 A total of 47,196 new registrants were also added to the electoral register. These were people of whom the EONI had no previous record of being registered to vote in Northern Ireland. This figure included a total of 9,945 attainers.

## Variations in registration

5.3 The constituency with the highest estimated registration rate was Newry and Armagh at 92.8% and the lowest was Belfast South at 70.5%.

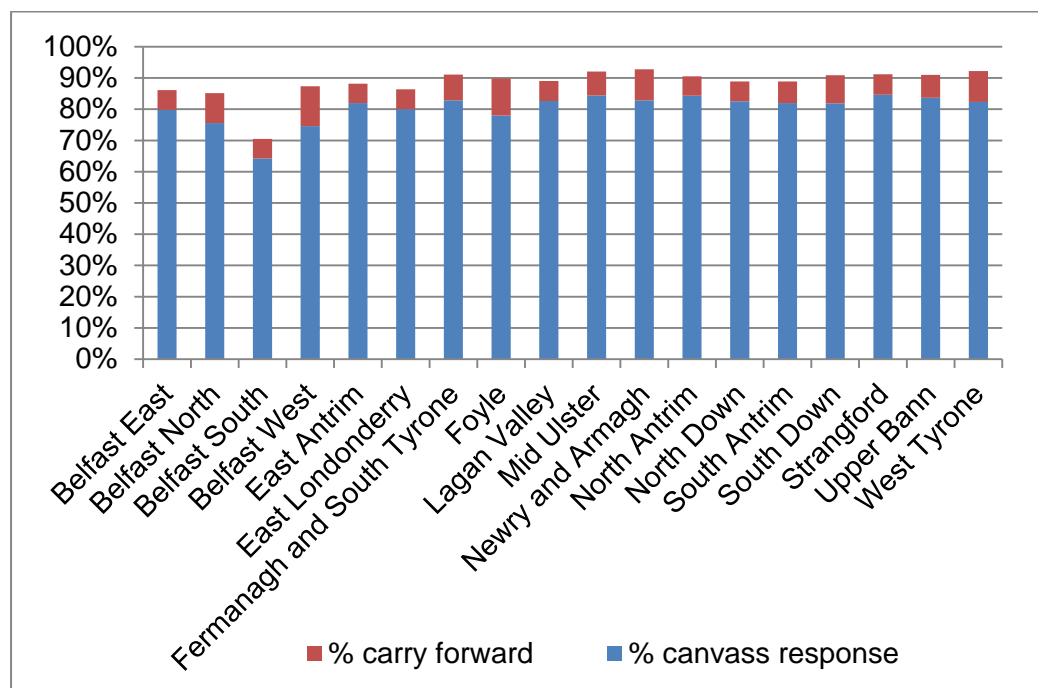
5.4 The constituency with the highest number of people retained on the electoral register was Belfast West with 9,021 retained. This equates to 12.7% of the electorate registered in the constituency. The second highest was Belfast North at 7,676 (9.6%) and the lowest was East Antrim with 4,391 names retained (6.2%).<sup>11</sup>

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<sup>10</sup> This assumption is based on evidence from the Commission's previous research into electoral registration which suggests that the register is at its most accurate following a full canvass with a good response rate.

<sup>11</sup> The registration rates shown are the registered electorate at the conclusion of the canvass as a percentage of the estimated 17+ population. The total registered electorate includes those electors who responded to the canvass and those electors retained on the register as a result of data checking carried out by the Electoral Office.

**Figure 3: Percentage of names retained on the register per constituency December 2013**

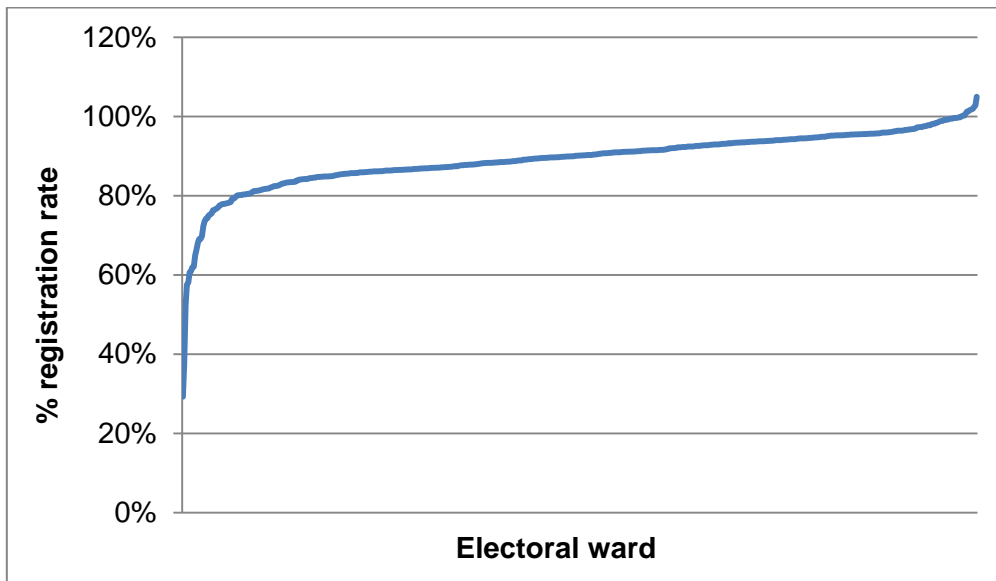


5.5 The estimated registration rate at constituency level masks some more significant variation at ward level – as shown in Figure 4. By ward, the percentage of the electorate estimated to be registered varies from approximately 30% in the Botanic ward in Belfast South to 105% in the Creggan ward in the Newry and Armagh constituency.

5.6 There are 12 wards where the estimated registration rate is over 100% and this highlights the limitations of this method of calculating registration rates. The population figures provided by the 2011 census are estimates and may over or understate the true population from area to area.<sup>12</sup> However, while the specific percentage registered figure should be treated with caution, the figures are useful in illustrating the overall range of registration rates.

<sup>12</sup> These wards are: Shantallow East, Killeen, Termon, Brookeborough, Tempo, Saintfield, Katesbridge, Cairnshill, Donagh, Florence Court and Kinawley, Creggan South and Creggan

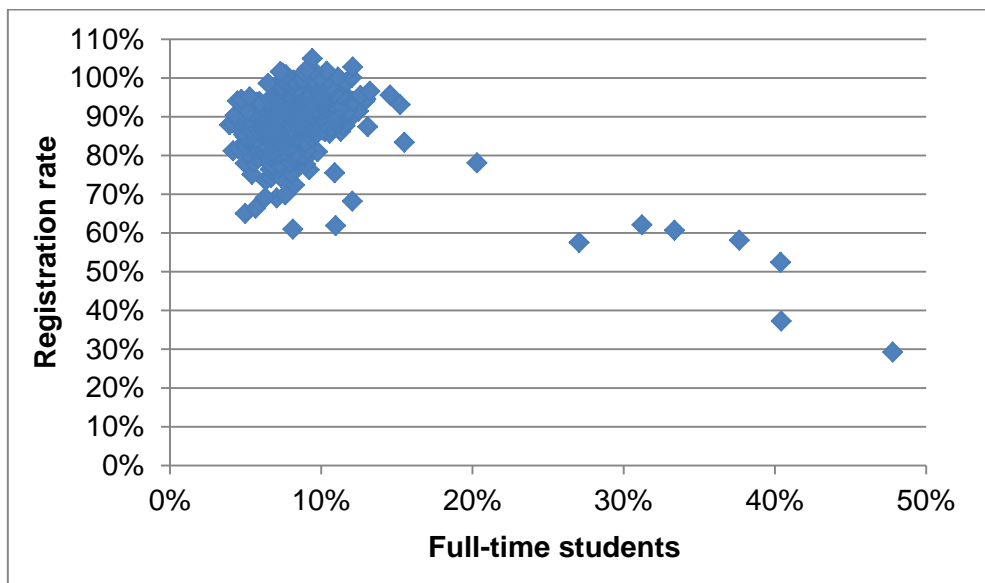
**Figure 4: Estimated registration rate by ward**



5.7 Even with the two outlier wards with the lowest levels of registration removed (Botanic and Windsor wards – both below 40%) there is still a significant range from just over 50% to over 100%.

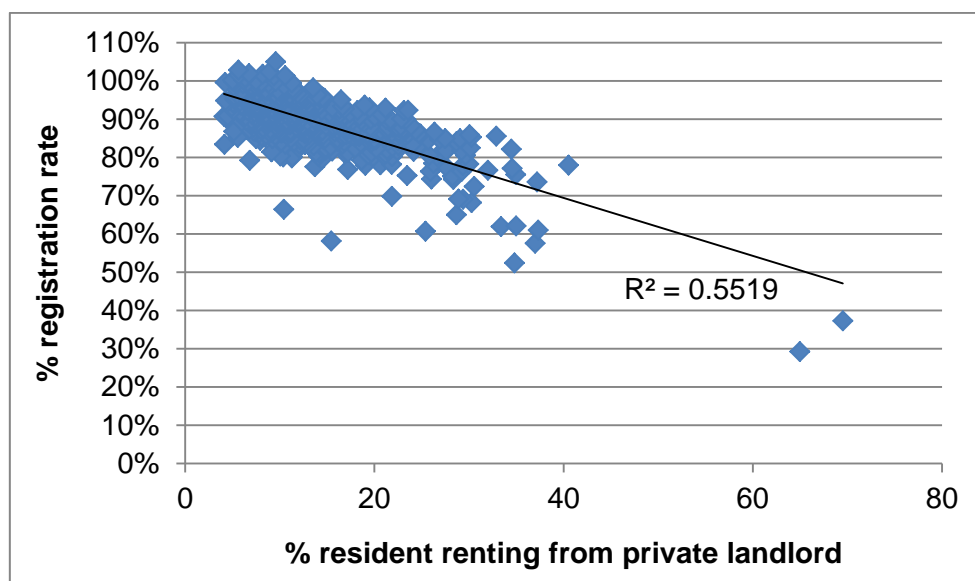
5.8 This variation in estimated registration rates is likely to be the result of a combination of factors – including the accuracy of the population estimates. One important issue appears to be the proportion of students in a ward. Figure 5 below illustrates the relationship between the percentage of full time students resident in a ward and the estimated registration rate. While the overall relationship is not strong it is clear that where students make up a third or more of the total population of the ward the estimated registration rate falls away significantly.

**Figure 5: Estimated registration rate and percentage of full time students by ward**



5.9 There is a clearer correlation overall between the estimated registration rate for a ward and the proportion of people who rent from a private landlord. This relationship between registration and tenure is consistent with previous research in both Great Britain and Northern Ireland. Figure 6 below illustrates how the registration rate is negatively correlated with the proportion of private renters (i.e. as the proportion of private renters increases, the level of registration tends to decrease).

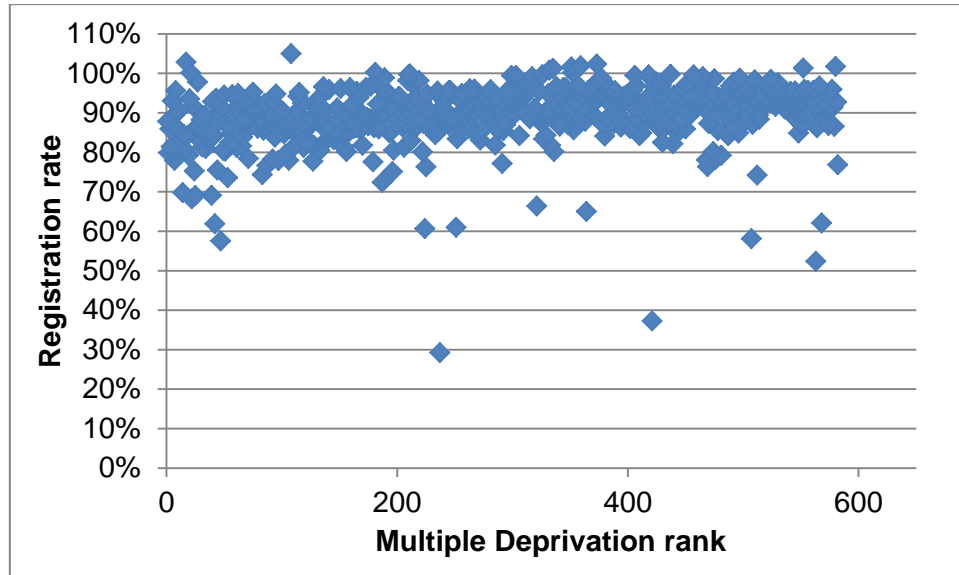
**Figure 6: Estimated registration rate and percentage of residents renting from a private landlord by ward**



5.10 However, there appears to be no discernible relationship between estimated registration rates and levels of deprivation in a ward. Figure 7 below

shows registration rates for all wards against that ward's overall multiple deprivation rank.<sup>13</sup>

**Figure 7: Estimated registration rate and multiple deprivation rank by ward**



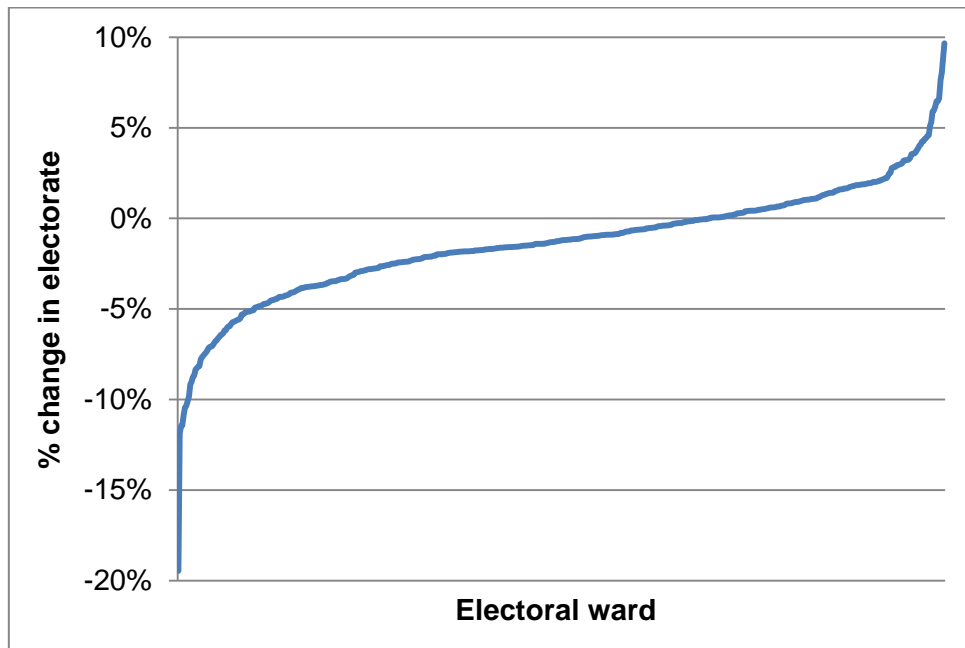
5.11 Individual electoral wards also show significantly more variation in the absolute size of their electorates between before and after the canvass. At a constituency level the percentage change in the number of entries on the register between 1 August 2013 and 1 December 2013 varies from -4.4% (Foyle) to 0.2% (Lagan Valley). Lagan Valley was the only constituency to record an increase in the number of entries on the register.

5.12 At ward level, The Cut (Upper Bann) shows the largest decrease in register entries between August and December (-19.5%) while Ballydown (also Upper Bann) shows the largest increase (9.7%).

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<sup>13</sup> Indices of multiple deprivation identify the most deprived areas across Northern Ireland. They combine a number of indicators, chosen to cover a range of economic, social and housing issues, into a single deprivation score.

**Figure 8: Percentage change in total entries on the register between August and December 2013 by ward**

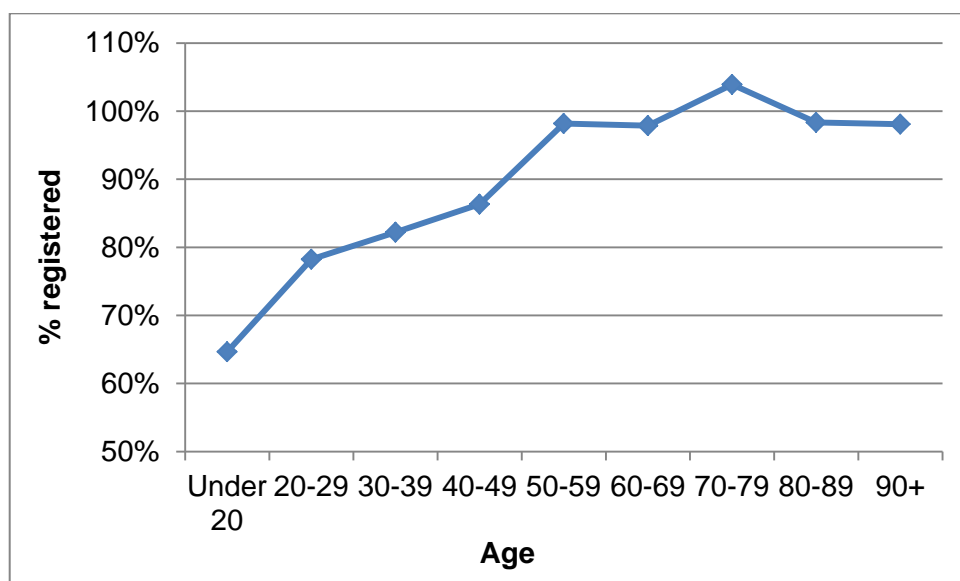


## Age profile

5.13 In Northern Ireland, it is possible to analyse the age profile of the registered electorate as each elector provides their date of birth, as a personal identifier, when registering.

5.14 The key finding of this analysis, as shown in Figure 9, is that young people are less likely to be registered than older people. This supports the findings of previous similar analysis as well as other research carried out by the Commission into electoral registration in Great Britain.

**Figure 9: Percentage registered by age band**



5.15 As with other analysis in this report, the use of estimated population figures means that some percentages are greater than 100%. Therefore the percentages should be treated with caution and are most useful for illustrating a trend, not establishing specific levels of registration.

5.16 Those aged under-20 appear significantly less likely to be registered with approximately two-thirds of the total estimated population registered. This steadily rises through the age groups with a very high proportion of everyone aged 50+ appearing on the register (as elsewhere in this report, these figures assume that there was a very high accuracy level at the conclusion of the canvass and that nearly everyone appearing on the register was registered at their current address, at that point in time).

5.17 The low levels of registration among the under-20s may be partly explained by the drop in the number of attainers on the register. This can be partially explained by the fact that the EONI did not conduct any activity with schools to register attainers in autumn 2013. The Chief Electoral Officer has advised us that resources were committed to the canvass during this time but that the schools activity will recommence in September 2014.

# 6 Conclusions and recommendations

## Success of the canvass

6.1 Overall the 2013 electoral registration canvass in Northern Ireland was successful in meeting its objectives. The data provided to us by the Electoral Office suggests that it has resulted in significantly higher levels of electoral registration than was the case beforehand.

6.2 However, it is important to note that the Commission has not undertaken a full assessment of the accuracy and completeness of the register using our preferred methodology of house-to-house surveying. Carrying out this work is costly and we opted initially to analyse the available data from the canvass in order to assess the success of the canvass. If the data provided was either inadequate to make an assessment or suggested there had been problems with the canvass, we would have re-considered whether a full accuracy and completeness study was required.

6.3 We cannot therefore say what the accuracy and completeness of the post-canvass register is compared to the levels found in our 2012 study, when accuracy was found to be 78% and completeness 71%. However, our analysis of the canvass data suggests that there will be now be a significantly higher level of both accuracy and completeness as a result of the canvass.

6.4 A key achievement was the successful use of data matching to manage the register and to retain eligible electors on the register. The effective use of the data sources available to the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland can play a significant role in maintaining high levels of accuracy and completeness of the register.

6.5 However, there is a significant risk of deterioration in both the accuracy and completeness of the register in the absence of a robust strategy to manage the electoral register in the longer term. The recommendations contained in our 2012 report on Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland (Appendix B) continue to provide the basis for the management of the register in the medium to long term. However in light of the canvass and recent legislative changes we make the following additional recommendations.

## Registration strategy by Chief Electoral Officer

6.6 It is clear that returning to a similar approach adopted before the canvass to manage the register would risk repeating the problems of the past. Therefore it is essential that the Chief Electoral Officer puts in place a medium to long term strategy to target those who are either not yet registered or not accurately registered at their present address.



6.7 The data matching process adopted to retain names on the register is clearly an effective tool to help manage the register and should be a key component of the registration strategy. The Chief Electoral Officer should also look at how he can use this data to identify individuals not registered and consider ways of effectively targeting them.

6.8 In addition to this the Chief Electoral Officer should put in place a public engagement strategy and action plan. We would be happy to work with the Chief Electoral Officer in the development of such a strategy. In preparing for the transition to IER in England, Scotland and Wales, we have developed comprehensive guidance and supporting tools and templates to support EROs in developing strategies and plans to engage with residents in their local area, which should also be of assistance to the Chief Electoral Officer in developing his strategy and plan. Additionally, we have reviewed the strategies of all EROs in England, Scotland and Wales and so will be able to share learning from this work with the Chief Electoral Officer – including providing him with examples of work undertaken by EROs facing similar challenges.

6.9 Using information available to him through the register and external data sources the Chief Electoral Officer should be able to identify the key challenges at a local level across Northern Ireland. The public engagement strategy and action plan can then set out what can be done to combat low registration and/or likely changes to the register. This should include partnership working with a wide range of bodies and groups, making effective use of social media and reviewing how EONI communicates directly with the electorate.

6.10 Continual monitoring and evaluation of this work will assist the Chief Electoral Officer in seeing whether or not the strategy is enabling him to reach as many electors as he can. The strategy and plan should be kept under constant review, with amendments made where necessary to ensure they remain appropriate. Again, this work will be similar to that being carried out by Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain during the transition to individual electoral registration. In that case, local Electoral Registration Officers should be using the data available to them regularly to monitor their progress and keep their plans under review. We will be working with those Electoral Registration Officers we have identified may need more targeted support to ensure that individual registration is implemented successfully by supporting them to understand what the data is telling them and how they can use it to ensure their strategies and plans remain appropriate.

6.11 We note that the Chief Electoral Officer has already undertaken a programme of work running registration and electoral ID clinics across Northern Ireland ahead of the European Parliamentary and local council elections and we welcome this activity. Such voter facing contact is a positive step in managing the register. However we recommend that the Chief Electoral Officer conducts an evaluation of these and future clinics to assess the impact of this activity and to publish its findings.

6.12 In order to monitor the success of the overall registration strategy we also recommend that the Chief Electoral Officer produces and publishes monthly statistical reports. This is particularly important in the context of continuous registration where there is no annual canvass, and will demonstrate the impact of the strategy on a continuing and regular basis. Such reports would provide an overview of changes to the electoral register and how the data provided by DWP and BSO has been used during that period. It should also include details of any activity undertaken by the EONI to encourage registration and what the outcome of this was. This should include data and outcomes of the activity undertaken by the EONI including registration clinics and the issuing of letters. Such information will assist the Chief Electoral Officer in assessing if such activity can be improved and if it provides value for money, and should support him in keeping his plans under review, with amendments made where necessary to ensure they remain appropriate. In addition this information will assist the Commission in identifying when, if any, future research should be conducted into the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register.

6.13 In England, Scotland and Wales, the Commission will be collecting data from all 380 Electoral Registration Officers at three key points during the transition to individual electoral registration.<sup>14</sup> We will publish this data and an analysis of what it is telling us about the progress of the transition after each of these points.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Following the May 2014 elections the Chief Electoral Officer should develop a strategy to identify individuals not registered or whose details are no longer correct on the electoral register. The strategy should make full use of the data sources available to the Chief Electoral Officer.
- By October 2014 the Chief Electoral Officer should develop and produce a public engagement strategy and action plan to identify and challenge low levels of electoral registration as well as likely changes to the register.
- The Chief Electoral Officer should produce monthly statistical reports on changes to the electoral register. We will use this data to consider when, if any, future research should be conducted.

## Performance standards

6.14 The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2014 includes a provision to extend the performance standards framework that applies in Great Britain to Northern Ireland. The introduction of performance standards to Northern Ireland will bring the Chief Electoral Officer closer to all other

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<sup>14</sup> Further information on the Commission's work to monitor the effectiveness of the transition to individual electoral registration in England, Scotland and Wales can be found in our March 2014 report 'Readiness for the transition to Individual Electoral Registration'.

Electoral Registration Officers in the UK and will enable him to contrast his registration activities and their success with other Electoral Registration Officers. It will also help to facilitate easier identification and sharing of learning as to what works and what doesn't between the Chief Electoral Officer and Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain.

6.15 To support the delivery of the transition to IER in England, Scotland and Wales, the Commission has put in place a performance standards framework which is designed to support Electoral Registration Officers in monitoring their progress with maximising registration under the new system. As part of this, the Commission will collect key data from all Electoral Registration Officers at fixed points which will demonstrate how effectively the transition is being delivered. This framework will remain in place until the end of the transition to IER.

6.16 At the same time as the transition to individual electoral registration in Great Britain is underway, the Chief Electoral Officer has agreed to pilot new registration standards from January 2015. These standards will reflect any lessons learnt from the work being undertaken by the Chief Electoral Officer to develop a registration strategy and monitor its success, as well as any learning emerging from the Commission's work to monitor and support Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain in preparing for and delivering the transition to individual electoral registration. This pilot will provide important lessons for the development of new standards that can be adopted across the UK. Alongside this the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland should introduce the necessary Order to put performance standards on a statutory footing in Northern Ireland so that the new standards can be applied across the UK.

6.17 In the interim period, in addition to the publication of the monthly statistical reports mentioned above, we would encourage the Chief Electoral Officer to provide more information on the work he has undertaken to manage the electoral register in his annual report to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland. This could include more detailed information on the work done with schools to target attainers, the results of issuing letters and the strategies put in place to target under-registered groups in Northern Ireland. The provision of such information can help to promote transparency and public confidence in the registration process until the performance standards framework is fully operational.

#### **Recommendations:**

- Commence pilot of performance standards in Northern Ireland in January 2015. This pilot will provide important lessons for the development of new standards that can be adopted across the UK following the conclusion of the transition to individual electoral registration in Great Britain.
- In the interim and to further promote transparency and public confidence in the electoral registration process the Chief Electoral Officer should, in addition to publishing monthly statistical reports, provide detailed

information on the work he has taken in his annual report to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland.

## Preparing for elections

6.18 As noted above the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland and his staff have run a number of registration and ID clinics ahead of the European Parliamentary and local council elections in May. Following an evaluation of this work the Chief Electoral Officer should consider the need for similar activity to take place throughout the rest of the year and also ahead of elections in 2015 and 2016.

6.19 For our part we will continue to support registration activity by running public awareness campaigns ahead of these electoral events to encourage the public in Northern Ireland to check that they are registered to vote.

6.20 The current provisions to retain names on the register will expire after the UK Parliamentary election in 2015. After this time a person who was retained on the register through data matching will be removed from the register if they have not completed and returned a new registration form. Given that the Northern Ireland Assembly election has been moved from 2015 to 2016 the Chief Electoral Officer has recommended that the UK Government should amend the regulations allowing for this retention to be extended to 2016 to ensure that all eligible electors can take part in these elections. We would support this request.

### **Recommendation:**

- The UK Government, through the Northern Ireland Office, should amend the current regulations to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to retain names on the register until after the Northern Ireland Assembly elections scheduled in 2016.

## Future policy and legislation

6.21 The Chief Electoral Officer has advised the Commission that he would like to explore the potential for changes to the law that would allow a more flexible approach to managing the electoral register in future. This could include allowing him to amend a person's details on the electoral register if he is satisfied, through data matching, that their details have changed. As the law currently stands an entry can only be amended when a person completes and returns a new electoral registration form. This would likely require a change to primary legislation, and could have implications for Electoral Registration Officers and the registration process throughout the UK which would need to be fully considered by the Government with input from the Commission, Electoral Registration Officers and other stakeholders in the electoral process.

6.22 Later this year individual electoral registration (IER) will be implemented in England, Scotland and Wales, with the transition to the new system being completed at the latest by December 2016. Online registration will be a key part of the move to individual electoral registration in Great Britain, which will make it easier for people to apply to register to vote or update their registration details. The Chief Electoral Officer along with the Northern Ireland Office should monitor closely the implementation and impact of online registration in Great Britain to assess the benefits and practicalities that such a process could bring to maintaining the electoral register in Northern Ireland.

6.23 Allowing online electoral registration in Northern Ireland should be considered in the context of wider opportunities for modernisation, which could provide a streamlined process of electoral registration across the UK in which the process of automatic registration (as highlighted above) could also be considered. This would also include considering possible future alignment of the electoral registration process between Great Britain and Northern Ireland. We will continue to keep this under review as individual electoral registration is implemented in England, Scotland and Wales.

#### **Recommendations:**

- The Chief Electoral Officer and the Northern Ireland Office should monitor the introduction of individual electoral registration in Great Britain to identify any lessons that could be learned to inform the operation of the system in Northern Ireland.
- We will continue to monitor the introduction of individual electoral registration in Great Britain with a view to identifying the longer term impact this could have on how the process is administered in Northern Ireland.

## Lessons for Great Britain

6.24 As highlighted throughout this report IER will be implemented later this year in England, Scotland and Wales. The experience of implementing continuous individual electoral registration over the last decade in Northern Ireland has been significant in informing the development of the policy approach for the implementation of IER in England, Scotland and Wales.

6.25 The experience of data matching during the Northern Ireland canvass has been a positive one. Using DWP data and that available from the Business Service Organisation the Chief Electoral Officer was able to make a match between both or one of those sources to 98.7% of entries on the electoral register. Using this data in an effective way in the future has the potential to not only help improve the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register but also to ease the administrative burden in contacting eligible electors to retain their name on the register. While the Chief Electoral Officer does benefit from the centralised structure and availability of data in Northern Ireland there are nevertheless lessons to be learnt from Great Britain once the transition to IER is complete.

6.26 A key part of the transition to IER in Great Britain will involve matching the name and address details of electors included on electoral registers in June 2014 against information held by DWP. Where the register and DWP information match, entries will be confirmed and retained on the electoral register without requiring an individual application by those electors. Those people who cannot be confirmed through this matching process will be sent an invitation to register individually, either online or by using a paper form which has been designed and user tested by the Commission.

6.27 The new electoral register published by 1 December 2014 in England and Wales (by 2 March 2015 in Scotland) will include all those electors who were successfully matched against DWP data, as well as those who registered individually under the new system. Entries for electors who were not confirmed and did not register individually will also be retained on the register published by 1 December 2014 in England and Wales (by 2 March 2015 in Scotland), and will therefore be able to vote at the 2015 UK Parliamentary election.

6.28 This confirmation process, using data matching with DWP records, is not currently expected to be repeated in future years. The annual canvass of properties in autumn 2015 will involve sending Household Enquiry Forms (HEFs) to all properties to collect information about who is resident at an address. While existing electors will not be required to provide their personal identifiers in order to remain registered, EROs will use information from the annual canvass process to identify any potential new electors and invite them to register, and also to identify where existing electors may no longer be entitled to be registered to vote at an address in order to initiate steps to remove them from the register.

6.29 Experience from Northern Ireland indicates that matching electoral registration information against DWP data, as well as local records, could help EROs maintain levels of accuracy and completeness of electoral registers, without having to attempt repeated contact with electors from some properties. Learning from the experience of the Chief Electoral Officer in Northern Ireland, particular consideration will need to be given to how EROs in England, Scotland and Wales can access centrally available data such as that held by DWP on an on-going basis, in addition to the publically held data at a local level that they are already able to access.

6.30 Availability and access to such data will require input from Government, the Commission and the Information Commissioner as well as other appropriate bodies but could play an important role in the future management of the registration process.

## **Recommendations:**

- We have already put in place extensive plans to monitor the transition to IER in England, Scotland and Wales. The lessons learnt from this work and the evaluation of the activity conducted by the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland over the next 18 months should be used to inform the arrangements for managing the electoral registers across the UK following the end of the transition to individual electoral registration in England, Scotland and Wales.

# Appendix A

## Background to electoral registration in Northern Ireland

The Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 fundamentally changed the electoral landscape in Northern Ireland. It replaced the system of household registration with individual electoral registration (IER), whereby all eligible persons had to register individually on an annual basis and provide personal identifiers in the form of date of birth, National Insurance number and signature. The Act also required voters to produce a specified form of photographic identification at polling stations before being issued with a ballot paper.

When the first electoral register under individual registration was published in December 2002, it contained almost 120,000 (approximately 10%) fewer names than the final register published under household registration in August 2002. This reduction was the subject of much media commentary and debate. The Commission produced a report assessing the operation of the Electoral Fraud Act after its first year in operation. Our report concluded that the first register compiled under individual registration was less inaccurate than the last register compiled under household registration. It also highlighted, however, that more needed to be done to register specific groups, including young people, people with disabilities and those on low incomes, as research had shown that these groups were more likely to be under registered.

In the period from 2004 to 2007 we produced a series of research reports monitoring the impact of individual registration on the numbers of people registered. The research demonstrated that the requirement to collect personal identifiers from every elector through the annual canvass every year (even if their registration details remained the same) had a negative impact on the number of forms returned and the numbers of people registered - the numbers declined by approximately 2-3% each year.

In November 2005 the UK Government announced its intention to move away from the requirement for the electoral register to be fully refreshed every year. The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 introduced a range of legislative reforms including the removal of the legal requirement to conduct an annual canvass, improved access for the Chief Electoral Officer to other data sources, the extension of the registration deadline to 12 days before polling day and the setting of registration objectives for the Chief Electoral Officer.

Under this system, known as continuous registration, once an eligible elector has registered, they do not have to re-register unless their personal details change – for example, if they change their address or name.



In 2008 we conducted an assessment of the electoral register following the first full year of continuous registration being in operation. It found that the electoral register published in December 2007 was 83.4% complete and 94.3% accurate.

The Northern Ireland (Miscellaneous Provisions) Act 2006 also provided for a full canvass of electors to be held in 2010 unless the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland ordered otherwise. The then Chief Electoral Officer recommended against a canvass in view of the level of the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register. Accordingly the Secretary of State was satisfied that the public interest did not require a canvass.

The Act, however, requires the Chief Electoral Officer to conduct a full canvass of electors in 2016 if one has not been conducted before the end of 2015. It also gave the Chief Electoral Officer a power to recommend to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland that a full canvass should be conducted in any given year.

# Appendix B

## Recommendations made in our November 2012 report on Continuous electoral registration in Northern Ireland

Before the 2014 elections, we recommended:

- Household registration activity, involving all necessary steps to identify who is entitled to be registered in respect of a property, to improve the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers .
- Appropriate funding for this activity should be made available to the CEO
- There should be public awareness activity to support the household registration work

In addition to this household activity, and beginning immediately, we recommended that the CEO should:

- Review all existing agreements with data holding organisations to ensure that they provide effective support to enable him to meet his statutory registration objectives.
- Review the effectiveness of his existing processes for contacting electors identified through data matching, in order to encourage registration applications/updates/and to review/remove redundant entries.

Finally, over the medium- to long-term, we recommended that the UK government introduces legislation to:

- Extend to Northern Ireland the performance standards framework that applies in Great Britain.
- Amend the statutory framework for the conduct of the canvass in Northern Ireland in order to allow for a more effective and efficient process, more closely aligned with Great Britain.

# Appendix C

## The canvass form



### CANVASS FORM

Please read the notes overleaf carefully before completing the form.

Please complete this form using **BLACK** ink and **CAPITAL** letters, sign the form and return it using the freepost envelope.

YOUR DETAILS		Ward: ENO:
Surname	<input type="text"/>	<b>Previous Surname</b> Please provide your most recent previous surname. <input type="text"/>
Forename(s)	<input type="text"/>	<b>Previous address</b> Please provide your most recent previous address. <input type="text"/>
The address where I am now living is as below		<b>Postcode</b> <input type="text"/>
Address	<input type="text"/>	<b>Other address</b> Only fill in this section if you have another address in the United Kingdom where you are, or have applied to be, registered. <input type="text"/>
<b>Phone number (optional)</b> We will only use this number if we need to check anything.	<input type="text"/>	<b>Postcode</b> <input type="text"/>
<b>Date of birth</b> (DD/MM/YYYY)	<input type="text"/>	<b>RESIDENCE</b> (see notes)
<b>Nationality</b> (for example British, Irish, French)	<input type="text"/>	I have lived in Northern Ireland for the three months prior to 15 October 2013. <input type="checkbox"/> Yes <input type="checkbox"/> No
<b>NATIONAL INSURANCE NUMBER</b> (see notes)		<b>EDITED REGISTER</b> (see notes)
<input type="text"/> e.g. AB123456C		Anyone can buy a copy of the edited register, including companies that send junk mail. If you don't want your details to appear on the edited register, tick here. <input type="checkbox"/>
Tick here if you have never had a National Insurance number <input type="checkbox"/>		
<b>DECLARATION</b>		
<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>I am a British, Irish, Commonwealth or European citizen.</li><li>To the best of my knowledge, the information I have given on this form is correct.</li></ul>		
You must <b>SIGN</b> this form in the box below, unless you are unable because of an incapacity or because you are unable to read. <b>No-one else can sign it for you.</b>		
<input type="text"/>		<b>*** Please keep all of your signature inside the white box, otherwise we may return the form to you.</b>
Date		<input type="text"/>
<b>If you cannot sign the form you must ask a witness to fill in the section below for you.</b>		
The person whose details are given on this form has told me that the information is correct. That person is unable to sign the form *because of an incapacity/because they are unable to read (*delete as appropriate)		
Signature of witness	Address of witness	
<input type="text"/>	<input type="text"/>	

# Appendix D

## Data matching – matchkeys example

A two phased approach was used as part of the data matching process. The first stage involved the use of data matching techniques to match records between the electoral register as of 2 September 2013 along with other administrative data sources and the second stage involved comparing the addresses for those people that were matched in stage 1.

The aim of any matching exercise is to match records from two different sources as accurately as possible. NISRA developed a new and innovative matching process based on methodologies designed in conjunction with the Office for National Statistics through the 'Beyond 2011' project.

The matching methodology developed a series of "Matchkeys" that could be used to identify an individual between different data sources with the added factor of resolving any inconsistencies or discrepancies that may exist about that individual on the different data sources. The "Matchkeys" were created by putting together pieces of information to create unique keys that could be used for automated matching. The highest level of matching is exact matching which links pairs of records that are identical on the data sources. Additional "Matchkeys" are then established to try and resolve inconsistencies between the data sources such as discrepancies in the spelling of names, the recording of date of birth or postcode. The "Matchkeys" are applied in a hierarchical approach, meaning that if you are matched in a "Matchkey" then you are not passed to the next "Matchkey" for comparison.

Proof of concept for this methodology was achieved by matching the September 2013 Electoral Register to the Department of Works and Pensions Customer Information System and then comparing the National Insurance Numbers for everyone that matched. Results from this analysis proved that the data matching process achieved a very high level of matches with a very high degree of precision.

In the examples outlined below three matchkeys are used for illustrative purposes to outline how this process in practice. As part of the data matching exercise conducted for the canvass a total of 9 matchkeys were established. The rules for these three matchkeys are:

- Matchkey 1: Forename, surname, DOB, postcode
- Matchkey 2: Forename initial, surname initial, DOB, postcode district
- Matchkey 3: Forename initial, DOB, postcode

### Matchkeys – example one

**Electoral register data:**

Name: Michael Kelly DOB: 08/02/1979 Postcode: BT8 5NA

**BSO data:**

Name: Michael Kelly DOB: 08/02/1979 Postcode: BT8 5NA

In this example the forename, surname, DOB and postcode identically match on the electoral register and the BSO database. Therefore this entry on the register would pass under Matchkey 1.

### Matchkeys – example two

**Electoral register data:**

Name: Michael Kelly DOB: 08/02/1979 Postcode: BT8 5NA

**DWP data:**

Name: Michael Kelly DOB: 08/02/1979 Postcode: BT8 6NA

In this example there is a discrepancy in the postcode recorded for Michael on the electoral register and the DWP data. There are no other possible matches on either dataset making this a unique entry. Using Matchkey 2 a successful match is made using the postcode district.

### Matchkeys – example three

**Electoral register data:**

Name: Michael Kelly DOB: 08/02/1979 Postcode: BT8 5NA

**BSO data:**

Name: Mick Kelly DOB: 08/02/1979 Postcode: BT8 5NA

In this example there is a discrepancy in the forename recorded on the electoral register and the BSO data. There are no other possible matches on either dataset making this a unique entry. Using Matchkey 3 a match can be made using the initial of the forename.

# Appendix E

## Data matching permutations

Permutation	Description of match with elector register	Retain or remove person from register
A	Match to BSO and DWP and both have the same address.	Retain
B	Match to BSO at same address but match to DWP at different address	Retain
C	Match to BSO at same address but no match on DWP database	Retain if EONI has previously verified National Insurance number
D	Match to BSO at different address but matched to DWP at the same address	Retain
E	Match to BSO at different address and matched to DWP at different address	Remove
F	No match on BSO but matched to DWP at the same address	Retain
G	No match on BSO and matched to DWP at a different address	Remove
H	Match to BSO at a different address and not matched to DWP	Remove
I	Not matched to BSO and not matched to DWP	Remove

### Example one

Joe claims benefits and has attended his optician regularly over the last five years. Joe has informed both the DWP and the opticians of his current address so that can receive his benefits and his reminder letter from the opticians. Joe did not respond to the canvass but was on the electoral register at his current address. As this address matches that held by the DWP and the BSO (who would receive this information from his optician) then Joe's entry on the electoral register is retained under permutation A.

### Example two

Joe has lived in Northern Ireland since birth and has been working for the last 10 years. He has attended his dentist regularly and updated his address with his dental practice. Joe has never claimed benefits and does not have any children. Joe did not respond to the canvass but was on the electoral register at this current address. Although a match was made with both the DWP and BSO data his address was different on the DWP database. However given that his address matched that held by the BSO (who would receive this information from his dentist) then Joe's entry on the electoral register would be retained under permutation B.

**Example three**

Joe is 35 and has recently returned from working in England. He has not attended his doctor, dentist or optician in over six years. Joe did claim benefits while not working in England. Joe's address in the BSO database is out of date and does not match the address at which he was registered to vote at before the canvass. In addition the DWP is unaware that Joe has returned to Northern Ireland and his details are not included in the data extract provided to the EONI. As such Joe is removed from the register under permutation H.

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