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Briefing summary Full briefing About the Electoral Commission First published: 1

February 2018 Last updated: 3 October 2019 Summary of the briefing Date: February

2018 For: MPs Full briefing This briefing has been prepared for the 2nd reading of

Glyn Davies MP's Bill on overseas electors on Friday 23 February 2018. The Bill makes

provision to remove the existing 15 year time limit on British citizens who live

abroad registering as overseas electors. This would apply to any British citizen

overseas who was previously resident or registered to vote in the UK. It applies only

to UK Parliamentary elections and makes no other changes to electors' eligibility to

vote in different types of elections, or to British citizens living in the UK.

Overseas electors Until 2015, the number of overseas voters registered to vote had

never risen above 35,000 At the 2017 UK General Election there was a record of

285,000 overseas electors registered to vote. There are no reliable estimates of how

many British nationals living abroad would be eligible to register under the current

15 year rule or if the time limit is removed in future. There has been a significant

increase following overseas voter registration campaigns in the run up to 2015 and

2017 General Elections, and interest in the 2016 referendum on the UK's membership of

the EU The Electoral Commission's overseas voter day took place on 10 May 2016; this

was supported by embassies and consulates around the world and was aimed at

encouraging British citizens who were eligible to register as overseas voters so that

they could vote in the EU referendum. The Electoral Commission ran a public awareness

campaign for overseas voters from 17 March to 9 June 2016. Over 135,000 overseas

voters registered in this period. The Electoral Commission If the Bill passes into

law, we will provide guidance for Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers

and campaigners to help them understand and comply with any changes to the rules for

overseas voters. We also stand ready to reach an increased overseas voter audience

through our public awareness campaigns which take place to drive voter registration

in the lead-up to UK Parliamentary elections. Key considerations Changes to the

eligibility of overseas voters will present practical difficulties for political

parties and campaigners to determine the permissibility of donations, and for the

Electoral Commission to take enforcement action where the rules have been breached.

To mitigate foreign influence on politics and elections, parties and campaigners are

only permitted to accept donations from British citizens overseas who are registered

to vote. A 2010 Supreme Court judgement ruled that a donor's eligibility to be

registered was a significant factor in deciding permissibility; we would welcome the

UK Government and Parliament taking this opportunity to clarify that a person must be

included in a UK electoral register at the point when a donation is made in order to

be a permissible donor. The UK Government should consider new approaches to improving

access to the voting process for overseas electors, for example by voting at

embassies and consulates, or the ability to download and print postal ballot papers.

Many overseas electors face significant practical difficulties in ensuring their

votes count; some have found there is not enough time to receive, complete and return

their postal vote before the close of poll, while others may not be able to appoint

someone in the UK to act as their proxy. Increasing the number of British citizens

overseas who are eligible to be registered to vote will add strain to already

stretched resources of electoral administrators, in terms of volume and complexity of

registration applications, requiring verification of identities and eligibility of

applicants who have not lived in the UK for some time. Our report on the

administration of the 2017 UK general election highlighted increasing challenges

faced at a local level in delivering well-run elections. This places extra emphasis on the need for the voter registration processes to be enhanced further by enabling better verification of information from other government services. About the Electoral Commission : enabling the delivery of free and fair elections and referendums, focusing on the needs of electors and addressing the changing environment to ensure every vote remains secure and accessible regulating political finance – taking proactive steps to increase transparency, ensure compliance and pursue breaches using our expertise to make and advocate for changes to our democracy, aiming to improve fairness, transparency and efficiency The Commission was set up in 2000 and reports to the UK and Scottish Parliaments. To hear more or request a meeting contact Laura Mcleod on 0207 271 0529 or at [LMcleod@electoralcommission.org.uk](mailto:LMcleod@electoralcommission.org.uk) Related content Proposals in the Queen's Speech Read our briefing for MPs from October 2019 Briefing: Our evaluation of voter ID pilots Read our briefing for MPs from May 2019 Briefing: The Transparency of Donations and Loans etc. (Northern Ireland Political Parties) Order 2018 Read our briefing for MPs from February 2018