

At the publication of the 2020 annual registers, there were 46,906,270 entries on the parliamentary registers in the UK. This was a decrease of 168,578 (0.4%) from the annual registers of 2019, which themselves had showed an increase of 2.8% from the previous year. This decrease from the 2019 to 2020 registers is likely to be as a result of the 2019 UK general election driving up applications ahead of the publication of the 2019 registers, coupled with lower levels of registration activity in 2020 likely linked to the fact that no elections were held due to the coronavirus pandemic. While COVID-19 presented particular challenges for EROs and their teams, the first reformed canvass in Great Britain was largely successful and the use of national and local data matching allowed EROs to target their resources towards those households where changes were needed. The electoral registers At the publication of the 2020 annual registers, there were 46,906,270 entries on the parliamentary registers and 49,063,707 entries on the local government registers in the United Kingdom. The total number of parliamentary entries decreased by 168,578 (0.4%) from the annual registers of 2019, which themselves had shown an increase of 2.8% from the previous year. The table below shows the change in each part of the UK between the annual registers of 2019 and 2020: Number of Parliamentary registrations 2019 and 2020 Area 2019 2020 % change England 39,476,140 39,298,264 -0.5% Scotland 3,988,550 4,012,429 +0.6% Wales 2,313,851 2,304,640 -0.4% Northern Ireland 1,296,307 1,290,937 -0.4% United Kingdom 47,074,848 46,906,270 -0.4% The total number of entries on the local government registers decreased by 90,059 (0.2%) from 2019. The change in number of local government register entries varied across the UK. The largest decrease was observed in the East Midlands (1.4%), while Scotland recorded an increase (of 1.0%) compared to the annual registers of 2019. However, it should be noted that the majority of EROs in Scotland published their 2019 annual registers in November. This meant that the registers did not include those who registered in the lead up to the 26 November 2019 registration deadline for the UK general election. The table below presents the local government register size from 2019 to 2020 and shows the percentage change for different parts of the UK: Number of Local Government register entries 2019 and 2020 Area 2019 2020 % change England 41,306,474 41,186,293 -0.3% North East 1,941,751 1,956,275 +0.7% North West 5,524,983 5,461,941 -1.1% Yorkshire and the Humber 3,989,849 4,025,884 +0.9% East Midlands 3,634,684 3,583,548 -1.4% West Midlands 4,308,174 4,276,920 -0.7% East of England 4,673,209 4,653,094 -0.4% London 6,097,439 6,116,260 +0.3% South East 6,829,241 6,813,201 -0.2% South West 4,307,144 4,299,170 -0.2% Scotland 4,167,361 4,208,923 +1.0% Wales 2,349,434 2,342,478 -0.3% Great Britain 47,823,269 47,737,694 -0.2% Northern Ireland 1,330,497 1,326,013 -0.3% United Kingdom 49,153,766 49,063,707 -0.2% Generally, changes in the number of registered electors in an area can be explained by the following: A change in the size of the population who are entitled to vote. This can happen due to international migration, internal migration, young people becoming old enough to vote and deaths of people currently on the register. A change in the proportion of the eligible population who actually register to vote. This could happen as a result of changed approaches to canvassing by EROs, national and local voter registration campaigns, a recent election or increased public interest in the political landscape. A change in the definition of eligibility. For example, in 2020 the right to vote was extended to

all foreign nationals with leave to remain in Scotland and Wales for local government and Scottish Parliament/Senedd elections. The right to vote was also extended to 16 and 17 year olds for the same elections in Wales in 2020. Comparisons to March 2020 registers The ONS published statistics in relation to the electoral registers as of 2 March 2020. These were produced to support the parliamentary constituency boundary review due to conclude in July 2023. As noted above, Scotland stands out as the only nation to record an increase in registrations from December 2019 to December 2020. However, when compared to the registers for March 2020 (which include registrations in the lead up to the 2019 UKPGE), the figures for Scotland are in line with the other nations.

	March 2020	on publication of annual register for 2020 (PAR2020)	% change
England	39,860,421	39,298,264	-1.4%
Scotland	4,079,612	4,012,429	-1.6%
Wales	2,322,677	2,304,640	-0.8%
Northern Ireland	1,295,688	1,290,937	-0.4%
United Kingdom	47,558,398	46,906,270	-1.4%

  

	March 2020	on publication of annual register for 2020 (PAR2020)	% change
England	41,684,472	41,186,293	-1.2%
Scotland	4,227,659	4,208,923	-0.4%
Wales	2,358,070	2,342,478	-0.7%
Northern Ireland	1,329,947	1,326,013	-0.4%
United Kingdom	49,600,148	49,063,707	-1.1%

Other register statistics

Attainers

Electoral registers include people who will reach the age of 18 in England and 16 in Scotland and Wales, and will therefore become able to vote (dependent on the franchise for each election), during the lifetime of the register. This group is referred to as attainers. Overall, the number of attainers on both parliamentary and local government registers continues to fall. Attainers on the parliamentary registers in Great Britain saw a fall of 21.0%. There was a fall of 18.0% on the local government registers. The overall decrease in attainers is driven by the change in England, with a significant decrease in the numbers registered on both the parliamentary and local government registers (25.9% and 26.1% respectively). This is likely, at least in part, to be the result of previous attainers now being of voting age and there being less registration activity during 2020 due to the postponement of the May 2020 local elections in England. However, we cannot rule out that at least some of this change relates to the reformed canvass and we will continue to keep this under review in order to further understand and mitigate the decline. The number of registered attainers increased in both Scotland and Wales. Scotland saw a small increase on the parliamentary registers (0.9%) and the number more than doubled on the local government registers (103.1%). This is likely linked to registration activity among voters aged younger than 16 who would then be eligible to vote by the time of the May 2021 Scottish Parliament election. In Wales, there were also significant increases on both the parliamentary (11.6%) and local government registers (11.2%) in Wales. Again, these increases are likely to be linked to registration activity among younger voters in preparation for being able to vote at the May 2021 Senedd election, where 16 and 17 year olds were eligible to vote for the first time.

	2019	2020	% change
England	254,384	188,472	-25.9%
Scotland	38,171	38,518	+0.9%
Wales	12,942	14,437	+11.6%
Great Britain	305,497	241,427	-21.0%
16 and 17 year olds (Scotland and Wales)	293,371	240,585	-18.0%

The voting age is lower for some elections in Scotland and Wales (Scottish Parliament, Senedd and local council elections) than for elections in England. The change in Scotland was introduced in 2015 and in Wales the change was made in 2020. Figures in this section

relate to the annual registers published on conclusion of the 2020 canvass (i.e. between December 2020 and February 2021). The data does not therefore include anyone who registered in the run up to the May 2021 elections in Scotland and Wales. In Scotland, at the publication of the annual register in 2020, there were a total of 73,272 16 and 17 year olds on the local government register. The table below shows the trend in the numbers registered since this change was introduced. Number of electors aged 16/17 on the local government register for Scotland, 2015 to 2020

Electors	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
16/17 year olds on local government registers	48,962	79,621	83,536	78,383	73,777	73,272

In Wales, at the publication of the annual registers in 2020, there were a total of 15,457 16 and 17 year olds on the local government register. Data on the numbers of 16 and 17 year olds registered for the May 2021 elections will be published alongside the Commission's reports on the polls.

**Overseas electors** A UK citizen living abroad who has been registered to vote in the UK in the past 15 years can apply to be an overseas voter. They are required to renew their registration every 12 months. The total number of overseas electors on the 2020 registers in Great Britain was 184,982. Number of overseas electors on the UK parliamentary register

Area	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
England	97,572	241,097	205,687	113,833	185,513	170,196
Scotland	7,729	15,230	12,790	6,679	11,587	9,617
Wales	2,940	7,567	6,995	3,678	6,969	5,169
Great Britain	108,241	263,894	225,472	124,190	204,069	184,982

This is a decrease of 9% since the publication of the annual register in 2019 and, due to the need to renew registration every 12 months, is likely to be largely driven by the absence of electoral events at which these electors could vote.

**Anonymous electors** The number of anonymous electoral register entries on the parliamentary registers in Great Britain decreased from 3,546 to 3,374 from 2019 to 2020. Anonymous registration is available for people meeting certain requirements, whose safety, or the safety of someone in the same household, is at risk. People registered anonymously appear on the electoral register without their name and address. Number of anonymous electors on UK parliamentary registers

Area	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
England	2,151	2,194	2,440	2,550	3,214	3,064
Scotland	111	117	116	130	194	196
Wales	74	74	85	108	138	114
Great Britain	2,336	2,385	2,641	2,788	3,546	3,374

**The 2020 annual canvass** In addition to reviewing the headline electorate figures, we also analyse information relating to activities undertaken by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain during the annual canvass period. There is no equivalent annual canvass in Northern Ireland. The canvass must commence between 1 July and 30 November, but EROs do not necessarily need to complete all canvass activity within this period. The 2020 canvass was the first to take place under a new model which incorporates data matching between the electoral registers and a combination of national and local data at the outset of the process. This data matching informs the ERO which properties are likely to have an unchanged household composition, to enable them to target their canvass activity accordingly. The ERO will then follow one of three routes for each property:

- Route 1:** This route is for properties where the registered electors match with other data and are assumed to have no change in household composition. The ERO will contact Route 1 households to invite them to provide information on any changes which have occurred, but where there are no changes, the household is not required to respond.
- Route 2:** This route is for properties where the current registered electors did not all match with other data and are assumed to have had a change in household composition which would require an update to be made to the electoral register. These households are required to respond to requests for information whether they do in fact need to report a change or not.
- Route 3:** This route is available for those properties where the ERO

thinks they can most effectively and efficiently obtain information on residents through a single ‘responsible person’ acting on behalf of all residents. Examples of these property types are care homes and student halls of residence. Should the ERO be unable to successfully obtain information about the property from a ‘responsible person’ they will need to canvass these property types using the Route 2 process. The sections below broadly follow a logical course through the canvass – starting with the allocation of households to the different routes, moving on to look at the responses received from households, and then the applications received from individuals. Finally we consider data on the effect of the electoral registration activity – changes to the registers (i.e. additions to and deletions from).

### Data collection

Following the publication of the annual registers the Commission requests data from EROs for each local authority area, along with information on their canvass process. The analysis and results in this section are based on the responses we received from EROs. In total, we received responses for 366 local authority areas across Great Britain.

### Households allocated to each route

Overall At the beginning of the canvass, all registers are matched against Department for Work and Pensions data and EROs then use the results to help them allocate properties to routes (as explained above). Following this national data matching exercise, our data shows that 19.5 million properties were allocated to Route 1 and 9.3 million to Route 2. In addition, EROs have the discretion to carry out data matching using local datasets such as Council Tax in order to aid with the process of allocating properties to routes. The majority of EROs carried out local data matching, with Council Tax being the most popular dataset used and respondents citing that this data was the most easily usable and accurate. The next most popular piece of data was housing benefit data. The local data matching step had a significant impact on the total figures for route allocations as shown in the table below.

Route Number	Allocated by national data matching	Number allocated after local data matching	Change (%)
Route 1	19.5 million	21.4 million	+10%
Route 2	9.3 million	7.5 million	-19%
Route 3	N/A	277,000	N/A

The proportion of properties allocated to Route 2 (26% after the local data matching stage) is broadly in line with that predicted in the UK, Scottish and Welsh governments’ statement of policy for canvass reform, which anticipated that around a quarter of properties would have to go down the Route 2 process nationally. Whilst we are aware of some EROs successfully using a range of local data for data matching, we also received feedback during, and following, the 2020 annual canvass, indicating that other datasets were more difficult to access. In response to this, we have undertaken work to expand our guidance on local data matching ahead of the 2021 canvass. We have included additional guidance on the ERO’s power to obtain data, and have also highlighted some practical considerations for how to work with other teams in local authorities to access data. Additionally, over the course of this year’s canvass, we plan to work with EROs to identify examples of good practice that we can share to support other EROs with effectively accessing and using a variety of local data sources.

### Variation in route allocation

Generally speaking, the allocation of properties down each route suggests a relatively stable picture across the nations of Great Britain. Within England the allocations were similar across regions although, perhaps unsurprisingly, London recorded the lowest proportion of Route 1 allocations (66.4%). This reflects the greater degree of population movement in London, with more properties failing to match with existing data and being allocated to Route 2 in order to pick up changes in household composition. The table below shows the proportion of properties allocated across each route for each region:

Proportion of properties in each route, by nation and region	Area	Route 1	Route 2	Route 3
England				

73.4% 25.7% 0.9% North East 78.9% 20.8% 0.3% North West 73.4% 25.9% 0.8% Yorkshire and the Humber 73.2% 25.4% 1.4% East Midlands 74.9% 23.8% 1.3% West Midlands 73.4% 25.3% 1.4% East of England 76.9% 22.5% 0.6% London 66.4% 32.6% 1.0% South East 73.4% 25.9% 0.7% South West 75.8% 23.7% 0.5% Scotland 72.1% 26.6% 1.3% Wales 75.1% 23.7% 1.2% Great Britain 73.3% 25.7% 1.0% Household response rates

The reforms to the canvass were designed to allow EROs to ensure their resources could be directed at households where changes needed to be made to the registers. In previous years, because all households were required to be chased for a response, even where there were no changes to report, significant effort and resource was being expended on households where the composition had not changed, with no benefit to the quality of the registers. In the 2020 canvass, around 8.8 million responses were received from households across all canvass routes. This compares to 23.8 million responses to Household Enquiry Forms at the 2019 canvass. This lower overall response suggests that the increasing targeting of activity in the reformed canvass was successful in reducing unnecessary response. Also, as anticipated in the UK's governments' canvass reform policy, there was a significantly higher response rate from those households in Route 2, where data matching had indicated a greater likelihood of a change in residents, compared to Route 1 (66% compared to 18%). Route 2 is also the route where EROs are required to chase for a response, by sending reminders and by trying different contact methods. While this balance of responses between Routes 1 and 2 is positive, it is important to note that although all households in Route 2 are required to respond, more than one third did not, meaning details for these households have not been updated when the data matching suggests updates were required. This will be an area to continue to monitor in future canvasses, and EROs and the Commission will be able to use the new ERO performance standards framework to support an analysis of the data to help understand and, where appropriate, address the reasons for this. The level of response for Route 2 varied significantly, as shown in the table below, with Scotland reporting the lowest response for Route 2 at 50% and England the highest at 67%. Within England, the North East was the region with the lowest response rate to both Route 1 and Route 2. Response rate for each route, by region and nation, 2020 Area Route 1 Route 2 England 18.5% 67.4% North East 7.4% 59.3% North West 13.5% 61.8% Yorkshire and the Humber 14.6% 70.5% East Midlands 16.4% 72.5% West Midlands 19.5% 69.3% East of England 17.6% 72.3% London 19.6% 59.7% South East 25.7% 71.5% South West 23.1% 72.4% Scotland 14.9% 50.0% Wales 14.9% 63.6% Great Britain 18.0% 65.5%

Types of household response

Households that respond to the canvass can record a major change (e.g. showing a potential new elector is resident), a minor change (e.g. amending the name of an existing elector) or no change (i.e. confirming existing details). A total of 2.6 million households who responded during the 2020 canvass reported a major change in their registration details. This represented 30% of all 8.8 million responses received across each route. These major changes were distributed by route as follows: Route 1 major changes: 791,720 (30%) Route 2 major changes: 1,801,283 (69%) Route 3 major changes: 26,835 (1%) This again shows that overall those properties in Route 2 that were identified by data matching as most likely to need changes to residents' registration details, reported the largest proportion of changes during the canvass. However, nearly a third of the major changes reported came from properties allocated to Route 1 and where the data had indicated no change was needed. It is important to bear in mind that, of all the households allocated to Route 1 (21.4 million), the proportion reporting a major change (791,000) is small (around 4%). However, these figures do highlight that the matching process does not accurately identify all properties where changes will be

needed. We will use the new ERO performance standards to support our work with EROs throughout the 2021 canvass to understand further the scale and impact of this. A further 6.1 million households reported no or minor changes to their registration details, representing 70% of households who responded. In order for this data to be more useful in future, we will work with electoral management software (EMS) providers to split this category up into no change and minor changes. Individual applications Canvassing activity with properties does not directly result in registrations. For example, where a household reports that a potential new elector is resident that individual still needs to submit an application to become registered. In the year to the publication of the annual register in 2020, a total of 5.3 million applications to register to vote were received. Of these applications, 2.8 million (53%) were received during the canvass period. The annual volume of applications tells us about whether the registers are picking up expected levels of change in the population. While the number of applications in 2020 (5.3 million) was much lower than in 2019 (7.5 million) it was in line with 2018 (5.3 million). The lower level of registration activity in 2020 is likely linked to the fact that no elections were held after being postponed due to the coronavirus pandemic. In 2018 there were no high profile national polls, with elections held in only some local authority areas in England. The proportion of applications in the canvass, compared to the rest of the year, tells us something about the relative effectiveness of the canvass itself in driving new registrations. In 2020, the proportion of applications during the canvass (53%) was lower than in 2019 (66%) and 2018 (62%), but much higher than in 2017 (37%). The position of 2020 relative to 2019 is likely explained by the 2019 UKPGE registration period taking place during the canvass in 2019, driving up applications. In 2017, the UK general election took place in June, which had the effect of driving applications outside the canvass period. The lower proportion of applications in 2020 compared to 2018 could be, at least in part, the result of a reduction in personal canvassing in 2020. At this stage it is not possible to disentangle the extent to which that reduction can be attributed to pandemic restrictions compared to the reformed canvass process. We will therefore continue to monitor this data in future years.

Applications During Canvass Period Outside of Canvass Period Applications (year around)

Year	Applications During Canvass Period	Applications Outside of Canvass Period	Total Applications
2017	2,663,859	4,616,616	7,280,475
2018	3,355,908	2,024,883	5,380,791
2019	4,934,200	2,592,349	7,526,549
2020	2,851,743	2,497,714	5,349,457

Change on the registers: additions and deletions Data on additions to, and deletions from, the registers provides a good understanding of whether registration activity is keeping pace with population change. Data relating to additions and deletions form a core part of the new performance standards to support EROs with measuring and monitoring the impact of their registration activities. Changes to the registers are generated from several sources. For example, once applications have been received and processed, EROs are required to add new eligible electors; EROs can also use data gathered from households and other existing data sources to identify records relating to home movers and those who have died, which they will need to take steps to remove. As population mobility varies across the country, so does the scale of the challenge of maintaining the accuracy and completeness of electoral registers faced by EROs. There were a total of 4.7 million additions to the registers and 4.9 million deletions from the registers in the year from publication of the 2019 annual registers to the publication of the annual registers for 2020. This represents 10% of the registers being added and 10% removed over the year. The number of additions in 2020 (4.7 million) was lower than that recorded in 2019 (6.3 million). The number of additions recorded in the canvass

period (2.7 million) was also lower than in 2019 (3.9 million). However, this is again likely to be linked to elections - 2019 saw three sets of electoral events, including a UKPGE where much of the registration activity was during the canvass period, while 2020 had no polls due to COVID-19. The number of deletions in 2020 (4.9 million) was very similar to that recorded in 2019 (4.9 million). The number of deletions during the canvass period in 2020 (3.1 million) was also very similar to 2019 (3.0 million). The proportion of additions and deletions across routes is largely in line with expectations, with more changes being picked up within the Route 2 households. Although as with the level of household major changes, which are directly related to additions and deletions, the data highlights that just over one third of the changes made to the registers were within households where the data matching did not suggest any change was needed. It is not possible from a single year of data to judge if this will continue to be a feature of the reformed canvass and, if so, what the longer term impact of it would be. This is an area we will continue to monitor.

Proportion of additions and deletions by route

Route	Additions	Deletions
Route 1	36%	37%
Route 2	61%	59%
Route 3	4%	4%

The number of additions and deletions as a proportion that took place during the canvass over 2020 varied across Great Britain. Additions and deletions by nation, 2020

Nation	Additions (full year)	Additions (canvass period) %	Deletions (full year)	Deletions (canvass period) %
England	4,140,112	56.4%	2,334,069	64.8%
Scotland	399,272	49.9%	199,357	58.2%
Wales	198,336	68.6%	135,994	69.8%
Great Britain	4,737,720	56.3%	2,669,420	64.5%

The table below shows that the proportion of additions (56%) during the canvass in 2020 is down on 2019 (62%) and proportion of deletions during the canvass during the annual canvass in 2020 (64%) up on 2019 (61%).

Year	Deletions	Additions
2015	58%	40%
2016	47%	38%
2017	56%	44%
2018	68%	32%
2019	61%	39%
2020	64%	36%

The level of additions and deletions matters because it tells us whether the accuracy and completeness of the registers is likely to be increasing or decreasing. As with applications, the pattern of annual comparisons between additions and deletions may be mostly explained by external factors (particularly the timing of significant national elections and, last year, the pandemic). However, it is not possible to draw conclusions after only one year of the new canvass on what impact, if any, the changes in the canvass process have had. We will continue to collect and analysis this data in order to monitor the trends over time.

Background

There is no national electoral register for the United Kingdom. A total of 368 separate electoral registers are compiled and maintained by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain, and one register for Northern Ireland is compiled and maintained by the Chief Electoral Officer. Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are required to maintain two electoral registers: Parliamentary register – used for UK Parliamentary elections Local government register – used for Scottish Parliamentary, Senedd, Northern Ireland Assembly, local government and Police and Crime Commissioner elections The electoral register is a property based database, with register entries linked to a property. This means that the quality of its information is affected by ongoing population change and EROs need to add and delete records for home-movers, electors who have died and newly eligible electors. New registers are published annually and reviewed most months. In Great Britain, there is a process of auditing the register annually before a revised version is published, which is known as the

annual canvass. Each ERO is required by law to conduct an annual canvass of all properties in their area to confirm their electoral register entries and to identify electors who have moved or were not previously registered. The annual canvass of 2020 was the first conducted since reforms to the process were introduced. This new model means that responses are not required from households that have been identified, through matching with national and local databases, as having had no recent change in composition. The new canvass model aims to allow EROs in Great Britain to better target their resources to households where updates to the electoral register are likely to be required. The data and analysis presented in this report is from data that the Electoral Commission collects from EROs following the end of the annual canvass. Typically, annual registers are published by the 1 December each year. In order to take account of the impact of the pandemic, this year EROs could publish their annual register up to the 1 February 2021. However, for simplicity, the registers are referred to as the 2020 annual registers throughout. [Link to related statistics and data](#) [Office for National Statistics- Electoral Statistics for the UK](#) [National Records Scotland- Electoral Statistics for Scotland](#) [Electoral Commission- Accuracy and completeness of electoral registers](#) [Related content](#) [2019 electoral fraud data](#) [about electoral fraud in 2019 and view the data](#) [Public attitudes](#) [Read our reports about public attitudes towards voting](#) [Modernising elections research](#) [This qualitative research looks at public attitudes to voting and the information available around elections.](#) [Feasibility studies: scope and approach](#) [This is part of our modernising electoral registration studies. Read about the scope and approach of the studies](#)