Modernising electoral registration: feasibility studies | Electoral Commission Modernising electoral registration: feasibility studies You are in the A modern electoral register section Home A modern electoral register In this section Electoral registration: the need for reform Feasibility studies: scope and approach Using public data sources to improve electoral registration in the UK Integrating electoral registration into public service transactions Better detection and management of duplicate registration applications Electoral registration reform and degrees of centralisation Appendix tables Modernising electoral registration The UK's electoral registers are the basis on which people may vote in elections and referendums – they are the practical expression of the franchise and therefore fundamental to democratic participation. Their accuracy and completeness are central to the health of our electoral system as a whole. The use of data is already beginning to revolutionise the provision of services across the public and private sectors, to the benefit of citizens and the delivery of efficiencies. There is great potential to explore how existing public data could be used to further improve our electoral registration system, and the benefits this could provide for voters. Plans to reform the annual canvass are a step in the right direction, but there is more that should be done to ensure we have a joined-up and year-round registration process, making it easier for people to register to vote and for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) to maintain accurate and complete electoral registers. We want the UK's governments to explore more fundamental changes to the UK's electoral registration framework, including making it more joined up with other public services. That means exploring: the potential for giving EROs access to data from other public service providers; automatic or more automated forms of registration; and integration of electoral registration into other public service transactions. Feasibility studies To help inform the debate about registration reform, we have carried out studies to explore how electoral registration can be modernised in practice. The feasibility studies covered four key areas of reform: Feasibility studies Better use of public data EROs can currently access data held locally by local authorities and other local sources to help identify potential electors and manage their electoral registers. We wanted to explore the potential benefits of enabling access to national-level public data, to identify people who have changed address and updated their details with other public services, for example when they have applied for a driving licence or passport. Direct or automatic enrolment processes We examined options for increasing the level of automation within the electoral registration system: automated registration, where reliable data would serve as the basis of an individual's electoral registration application, but citizens would still be required to take some steps to complete the process; and automatic registration, where citizens would be added to the electoral register, or their address updated, without them being required to take any active steps. Integrating electoral registration into other public service transactions We examined the extent to which electoral registration applications could be made simultaneously as part of or alongside accessing other public services. This would increase the number of channels available to citizens and improve the accessibility of the process. Better identification and management of duplicate registration applications We also considered a number of ways in which duplicate registration applications might be better identified and managed within the system. We wanted to understand the extent to which reforms could reduce the administrative impact of processing duplicate applications and help voters check whether they were already registered to vote. Key findings Importantly, we found that all the reforms were feasible from a

technical and operational perspective and could be implemented without radically altering the structure of the electoral registration system in the UK. In particular, technology already employed by the UK Government's Individual Electoral Registration (IER) Digital Service could form the building blocks for the majority of the reforms. This system already links all local authorities with a central service capable of verifying people against the Department for Work and Pensions' customer information system (DWP CIS) as part of the registration application process. The IER digital service also links and coordinates sharing data between the register to vote website (allowing people to apply online), DWP CIS (facilitating verification of applications) and the systems which are used locally to manage the 372 separate electoral registers in the UK. We found that this could be further developed to act as a conduit, receiving recent transactional data from new and reliable data sources. This data would then be passed on to the relevant EROs, who could then use it to target potential electors. The further development of the IER digital service could pave the way for systems of automated or automatic registration to be implemented, or for a more integrated electoral registration process, whereby the citizen would be given the option of registering to vote at the end of another online transaction, e.g. when applying for a passport or driving licence. To improve the identification and management of duplicate registration applications, we have concluded that all solutions would involve the creation of a unique identifier for each elector. This would enable the identification of duplicates either within local registers, or across registers, depending on the particular solution implemented. The feasibility studies also highlighted a number of challenges that would need to be addressed before steps were taken to implement any of the reforms. These include the importance of undertaking detailed testing of potential new data sources (which would require a legal gateway) in order to determine whether the options would deliver beneficial and cost-effective results. The reforms also raise broader public policy questions about data sharing, data protection and the limits of state intervention (particularly in relation to automatic registration) that require wider debate. Related content Reforming electoral law Find out about electoral law and the changes we want to see A modern electoral register Find out about the changes we want to see to the electoral registration system in the UK Transparent digital campaigning Find out about digital campaigning and the changes we want to see of elections Find out about the accessibility of elections and the changes we want to see