Integrating electoral registration into public service transactions

Modernising electoral registration: feasibility studies

First published: 26 July 2019 Last updated: 8 June 2021

Summary We examined the feasibility of options enabling simultaneous voter registration applications to be made alongside accessing other public services, thereby increasing the number of channels available to citizens and improving the accessibility of the process.

Summary

We developed several implementation options, each of which would involve information provided during the original transaction serving as the basis for an electoral registration application, should the citizen so wish. Our preferred option involved transactional data being saved to the source (e.g. DVLA) database and then transferred to the online registration website via a secure route. While this would involve some development work for the Government Digital Service (to redevelop the IER hub) and for each Data Source Organisation, the reforms are feasible from a technical perspective.

Public service transactions

We first reviewed existing attempts to integrate electoral registration into other services in the UK within the current legal framework.

Public service transactions

Integrating electoral registration into the student enrolment process. Sheffield City Council worked with universities in the Sheffield area to develop a student enrolment form that also included an invitation to apply for electoral registration. Students were asked to provide their NINo, date of birth, open register preference, voting method and declaration. This data was then passed to the ERO at Sheffield City Council, where the data was uploaded into the EMS and processed as an application. T he scheme proved very successful, with a take-up rate of around 66% of eligible students. The Northern Ireland Schools Initiative programme This was an initiative run by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland. It involved visiting around 180 schools with pupils in Year 14 (aged 17) to promote voter registration, encourage pupils to register by completing electoral registration forms and to take photographs for Electoral Identity Cards, which pupils could use as proof of age as well as to vote. Attending British citizenship ceremonies Some EROs and their staff attend British citizenship ceremonies to encourage new British citizens to apply to register to vote there and then. This has proven to be an effective way of targeting this group of electors. Website links Many local authorities and universities include links on their websites to direct potential electors to the UK Government voter registration website, as have several UK Government departments. This is a very basic example of how electoral registration could be more joined up with other public services. Summary These types of initiative have undoubtedly been successful and could be developed more widely. We will continue to pursue these in the short-term, such as through the sharing of good practice. However, we were also interested in the extent to which the electoral registration process could be integrated more completely into other online public services – for example, by allowing a person to apply to register to vote when making a driving licence or passport application. It was the latter level of integration that formed the principal focus of the feasibility study. Data and infrastructure Currently there is no real integration between electoral registration and other online public services. We examined various ways in which data from a source website (e.g. the DVLA online transaction web form) could be sent to the online registration website and from there pre-populate fields in the electoral registration web form. Our preferred option involved transactional data being saved to the source (e.g. DVLA) database and then transferred to the

online registration website via a secure route (API and IER hub). This would involve some initial development for each DSO, dependent on the current structure and environment of the source website and database. The type and format of data captured in DSO online forms would also be important considerations in developing an integrated system. Ideally, there would need to be an acceptable number of fields available from a DSO online transaction that could be reused in an online electoral registration application in order to justify integrating the electoral registration process with a particular service. The format of the reusable data from the DSO online transaction would also need to be compatible with electoral registration data formats. For example, if a citizen entered address data in a DSO online form that was then populated on the online electoral registration application form, the format of the address data in the source system would need to be compatible with the address format used for electoral registration. Integrating electoral registration into public service transactions: implementation scenarios We developed and tested two implementation scenarios that could potentially deliver a more integrated system of electoral registration system in the UK. We again considered models from other countries in developing the scenarios. For example, in Canada, most government forms feature an optional checkbox for eligible voters to share information with Elections Canada, while in the USA voter registration is integrated with driving licence application, renewal, and change of address processes. Both of the options we developed and tested could be implemented with some redevelopment of existing infrastructures (e.g. to allow for the secure pre-populating of an online electoral registration application form), including: establishing a link, e.g. API between DSOs and the IER hub; further development of the IER hub; and potential development of the DSO databases. Issues and challenges in integrating electoral registration with other public services Legal A suitable legal gateway would be needed to allow DSOs to integrate their systems with the online registration website. If a citizen chose to register to vote after completing another public service transaction, they would be invited to consent on the website to the reuse of their personal data, which would then be used to pre-populate an online electoral registration form. The implications of the Data Protection Act 2018 and General Data Protection Regulation (GDPR) would need to be considered if using external data to pre-populate an online electoral registration form. Operational A more integrated electoral registration process would require some resource investment by DSOs to develop and maintain the infrastructure, liaise with the IER hub team and provide technical support where necessary. Responsibility and accountability for the transferring of data and maintenance of the infrastructure would also have to be agreed between stakeholders. Scheduling Effective coordination, planning and communication would be required to develop and implement an integrated electoral registration solution across different organisations. Economic A comprehensive cost-benefit analysis would be required to understand the cost implications of developing the necessary infrastructure to transfer data from a source website to the online electoral registration web form or the IER hub. The cost would depend on the solution that would best fit within the current DSO infrastructures. It would also be necessary to understand the commercial arrangements involved in developing solutions for wider integration e.g. whether there would be transactional costs involved in sharing data and ongoing maintenance costs payable to each DSO with which the electoral registration process was integrated. As with the better use of data study, a detailed cost-benefit analysis would need to be completed on each integration scenario to further explore the cost-effectiveness of the reforms. This would require access to public data sources,

necessitating a legal gateway and incurring a cost. 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