



HM Government

Every Voice Matters:

Building A Democracy That Works For Everyone

A DEMOCRACY
THAT WORKS
FOR **EVERYONE**



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PREFACE

The Minister for the Constitution's vision for A Democracy that Works for Everyone

As the Minister responsible for democratic engagement, I welcome the publication of the UK government's first Democratic Engagement Plan.

This publication comes at a time of near-record levels of public participation in our democracy.

In recent elections, voter turnout has risen, while both the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register has improved. As we have seen, the turnout for the 2017 General Election stood at 68.7% – the highest figure for 20 years. This was also reflected in youth turnout, with more 18-24 year olds (64%) having their say at the ballot box than at any election since 1992. These are heartening figures, more so because – according to a 2016 Electoral Commission report – completeness and accuracy figures for the electoral register have risen to 85% and 91% respectively.

This level of increased democratic participation has taken place alongside some of the most significant reforms to our electoral registration system in a century, with the establishment of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014, together with the introduction of the online Register to Vote website.

Since then, over 30 million people have registered to vote: 75% of these did so using the Register to Vote website. Major electoral events such as the EU Referendum and UK Parliamentary General Elections remain the greatest driver for registration. Ahead of the General Election in June 2017 almost 3 million applications to register were submitted, including a record of over 622,000 on the registration deadline itself. Young people aged under 25s were particularly engaged, submitting over 1 million applications in this period - more than 35% of all applications.

Following the deadline for applications, the electoral register for the 2017 General Election reached a record level of 46.8 million electors.

While reform has made it easier than ever before to register to vote, the government is determined that more can still be done if we are to build a democracy that works for everyone.

We want to ensure that everyone eligible who wishes to register to vote and participate in our democracy is given the opportunity to do so. Currently, there are still millions of people

who are not enrolled on the electoral register or chose not to vote. The government wishes to ensure that in our democracy, every voice matters; choosing your democratically elected representatives is a crucial part of ensuring that the voices of individuals and communities are heard.

2018 will mark the 100th anniversary of women getting a right to vote and the 90th anniversary of the Equal Franchise Act. Yet 100 years on, there are still certain groups in society who feel unable to register to vote or to take part in elections. The publication of this Democratic Engagement Plan sets out measures that the government intends to take forward to encourage further participation in our democracy. While significant improvements have been made in recent years, there is still more to do to encourage even greater participation and involvement.

A New Narrative for Democratic Engagement

Narratives around democratic participation and engagement traditionally focus on national figures concerning turnout and registration. At the same time, interventions and campaigns encouraging electoral registration tend to take place in advance of an electoral event.

This means that focussed activity surrounding democratic participation can rise and fall, depending on the electoral cycle. This Democratic Engagement Plan seeks to establish a new narrative of sustained and strategic engagement, in order to encourage a longer-term approach to encouraging democratic participation.

It also recognises that we need to have a better understanding of the local variations that take place across our democracy. Both in terms of geographical variation and variation across different demographics, we need to seek to create a more finely grained approach to democratic engagement, and the processes by which people can be encouraged to register to vote and participate in elections.

Rather than 'democratic engagement' being viewed as a top-down process, the government believes that fostering democratic participation must start with an understanding of the barriers that prevent individuals and communities from registering to vote.

To do this, we need to recognise that the concept of democratic inclusion versus democratic exclusion is an issue of social justice. We seek to help people to register to vote so that they can feel democratically included, and part of the society that they live and work in. Democracy is not simply about participating elections: it is about being counted in your local community and believing that your individual voice matters.

Better Data, Improved Knowledge

For this reason, it is important to understand better which groups in society are more likely to be those who are 'under-registered'; we also need to better understand what are the perceived barriers that these under-registered groups face. This Democratic Engagement

Plan seeks to establish which groups the government has and intends to provide more focussed support and assistance in order to participate in our democracy.

For while democracy must be for everyone, improving the quality of our democracy must begin with a longer-term strategy for tackling the long term causes of under-registration in certain groups in society: understanding who faces democratic exclusion and why this is taking place. Using data and our knowledge about who these groups are and where they live will be key, which is why the government is also launching for the first time an online Atlas of Democratic Variation which will help highlight where democratic participation rates remain stubbornly low.

Underpinning this work is a new narrative that not only seeks to recognise the value of longer term planning, but also to highlight that further improvements in democratic engagement cannot be achieved by government action alone. We seek to work closely with both the electoral community, including the Electoral Commission, SOLACE, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Scottish Assessors Association, as well as organisations and charities that place further democratic engagement at the heart of their social mission. The government believes that the ‘democratic society’ as a whole can work together to help support this longer-term and more localised approach to tackling democratic exclusion. We hope that the publication of this Democratic Engagement Plan will help to encourage the work of other key organisations with whom we hope to work alongside.

A Continued Commitment to Modernising Electoral Registration

If we are to have a democracy that works for everyone, the government’s aim is to have the most complete and accurate electoral register possible. The introduction of IER has ensured that the accuracy of the register has been significantly improved, yet there is still more to do. The Annual Canvass has been unchanged for decades, with its processes set down in primary legislation that dates back to 1983 and beyond. While recognising the value and importance that the Annual Canvass brings to ensuring that we have an electoral register that is up to date and accurate, the government believes that the Annual Canvass process should be modernised for the twenty first century. Already we have begun a series of pilots to investigate what would be the most effective changes to modernise the Canvass, but a crucial part of the government’s modernisation of electoral registration will be delivering permanent change for the Annual Canvass by 2022.

This will not only benefit local authorities delivering the canvass; we want to ensure that the journey of electoral registration will above all benefit the citizen themselves, making it less onerous to register to vote, and therefore encouraging more people than ever before to participate in our democracy.

As part of our determination to modernise the process of electoral registration, we have begun work to understand which groups in society struggle most with this system, and what can be done to tackle some of the most significant groups that lead to a reduction in the accuracy and completeness of the electoral register, such as renters or regular home movers.

Again, better understanding and use of data and knowledge is key. The government intends to continue this important work, which is detailed in the Democratic Engagement Plan, alongside other initiatives that we will take forwards to modernise our electoral registration processes.

Every Voice Matters

A key part of my work as Minister for the Constitution has been to seek to identify the needs of those under-registered groups, who feel excluded from our democracy. I have toured every region in Great Britain, holding roundtables and meetings, to help understand which groups in society are affected by under registration and democratic exclusion.

This knowledge gathering exercise has already resulted in informing this Democratic Engagement Plan and developing several strands of work that the government has taken forwards this year, all focused on ensuring that groups facing barriers to democratic participation are recognised:

- ensuring survivors of domestic violence and abuse and those living in domestic violence refuges will be able to register to vote easier with their anonymity protected;
- performing an Accessibility Review of the Register to Vote website;
- reforming the use of the Certificate of Visual Impairment so that data can be shared with local authorities to help those with sight loss register to vote;
- launching a Call for Evidence to ensure that we can make our elections the most accessible ever by 2022;
- publishing a policy paper setting out the government's intention to legislate to end the 15 year rule preventing British nationals living overseas for longer than this time from voting; and
- the Higher Education Act included a commitment to encourage greater co-operation between HE providers and EROs, helping to facilitate more accurate student registration.

This Democratic Engagement Plan sets out further areas and additional under-registered groups for whom the government intends to instigate further work.

A Clear and Secure Democracy

The government has also been committed to ensuring that confidence in our democratic system is maintained. Protecting the rights of citizens to vote securely, in secret and free from intimidation or abuse is one of the cornerstones of our democracy, and is indistinguishable from the commitment to fostering a sense of democratic inclusion and participation. The reputation of our democracy depends upon a well run electoral system: just as we will continue to modernise our registration system to be the most accurate ever, we will ensure that our elections are safeguarded against any attempt to prevent individuals from having their equal voice heard at the polls.

The government's commitment to helping those who have been democratically excluded extends to ensuring that we have a clear and secure democracy in which everyone feels able to participate, with their individual identity protected. This is why the government has accepted many of the recommendations made in Sir Eric Pickles' report, *Securing the Ballot*. Next year, we will be piloting the use of identification, both photographic and non-photographic, in polling stations to bring our elections in line with many other countries in the world, which recognise the need to modernise and protect against the risk, and perception of risk, of electoral fraud. At the same time, we will be introducing further measures to tackle postal vote fraud and harvesting and investigating further how to mitigate against double voting fraud.

At the same time, the government is committed to ensuring that our democracy is as clear as possible: we will seek to maintain First Past the Post elections for UK Parliamentary elections, and to re-introduce this system of voting for mayoral and Police and Crime Commissioner Elections, where alternative systems have demonstrated an increased level of rejected ballot papers.

The Democratic Society

As has been stated, the government recognises that the work to increase democratic participation cannot be led by government alone. The role of local authorities, the electoral community and civil society organisations has already been highly influential in raising the issue of democratic engagement and encouraging voter participation. The government wishes to continue our positive working relationship with the wider Democratic Society, and to help foster a mutual sense of purpose and direction. This Democratic Engagement Plan sets out the government's intentions for future work, yet we hope to build on the developing partnership working that has taken place over recent years. Through greater strategic direction and joint working, we hope that we can help identify common aims and goals to help those for whom we have a common interest in assisting: those groups in society who are democratically excluded and currently do not appear on the electoral register, or struggle to vote and access our democratic process.

In September, the government announced the establishment of the inaugural National Democracy Week, which will take place 2-8 July, commemorating the anniversary of the passing of the Equal Franchise Act in 1928. The purpose of this week is to bring together all relevant groups and organisations whose common commitment to democratic engagement and participation can demonstrate not only the strength of our democracy 100 years on from women getting the right to vote, but also highlighting the need to continue to campaign for the democratic rights and responsibilities of those who are currently under-registered, highlighting the importance of the right to vote. We have established a National Democracy Week Council which will seek to work with civil society organisations to help deliver the programme of activity for National Democracy Week.

We will also continue to explore further initiatives to help provide further extra-curricular education for democratic engagement, as part of the wider Suffrage Centenary commemorations. At the same time, we are committed to working closely with the electoral profession themselves in delivering improved registration processes and reforms to electoral integrity; as a result, the government has also established an annual Electoral Summit, bringing all key democratic partners together to discuss challenges ahead, the first of which took place in December 2017.

We are committed to addressing these priorities according to the traditions of our democratic system. A new Charter of Democratic Engagement Values sets out how we will approach this work. This includes engaging with partners in a way that is inclusive and collaborative; promoting accessibility whilst ensuring that security remains at the heart of the electoral system; upholding impartiality and integrity; and encouraging transparency and responsibility.

Summary

This Democratic Engagement Plan is not intended to act as a rigid framework; rather, its intention is to set out and define for the first time where the government believes further action needs to be taken to encourage further democratic engagement and participation, by highlighting a new narrative of how we intend to tackle democratic exclusion, identifying and focusing upon the specific groups and communities who disproportionately represent those who are currently under-represented in our democracy. It does so through the core principles of:

Better Data, Improved Knowledge: Creating better and more finely grained data surrounding under-registration and democratic exclusion; through this, we are building improved knowledge of where our focused resources need to be placed.

Modernising Electoral Registration: continuing to improve our registration system both online and offline, so that it focuses on the needs of the citizen, and modernises and reforms the annual canvass process across the country so that we have the most complete and accurate electoral register possible by 2022.

Every Voice Matters: by recognising democratic participation and electoral registration as an issue of social justice, we are committed to ensuring that those who wish to vote but are prevented from doing so, are the focus of government efforts to make our elections the most accessible ever by 2022.

A Clear and Secure Democracy: by acknowledging that confidence in our democratic systems plays a crucial role in electoral participation and ensuring that individual voices are protected from intimidation and abuse, we will continue to safeguard our democracy, helping to strengthen trust in our electoral processes.

The Democratic Society: government recognises that we must take a longer-term and more strategic approach to encouraging democratic participation, but depend upon the close working of the electoral community and civil society organisations to help reach out to groups and communities who feel currently democratically excluded.

I look forward to further developing the details of some of the challenges and issues that have been set out in this Democratic Engagement Plan; it is clear that, if we are to build a democracy that works for everyone, we must continue to identify, highlight and act upon the injustice of democratic exclusion that still exists one hundred years on from women getting the right to vote. The government is already making significant progress in ensuring increased participation in our elections: we are determined to continue this work, ensuring every voice matters.



Chris Skidmore MP

Minister for the Constitution



Part One

The Landscape: Understanding Democratic Inclusion and Exclusion

Chapter One: The Challenge - Changing Patterns of Democratic Participation

The Government is committed to a democracy that works for everyone. This strategy will examine the challenges and opportunities for achieving that aim. It sets out a programme of democratic engagement and voter registration. It also explains how we will review existing evidence and explore the experiences of under registered groups and those representing and working with them. It details the next steps we will take as a Government to respond to these insights.

Competence for the local government franchise in Scotland and for registration for local government elections including Scottish Parliament elections has been devolved to the Scottish Government through the Scotland Act 2016. Similar powers are due to be devolved in Wales in 2018. The UK government retains competence for the UK Parliamentary registers and UK Parliamentary elections for all areas of Great Britain, as well as local elections in England and Wales

The Government wants to ensure that we maintain the level of democratic engagement generated by the EU Referendum in 2016 and General Election in 2017; that we continue our drive towards an electoral register that is more complete and accurate than ever before; and that we seek to remove the barriers that prevent any under registered group from participating in elections. In short we want to create a democracy that works for everyone.

Despite the buoyancy of the referendum register and record numbers signing up to vote in 2017, as the reports on completeness and accuracy of the registers for Great Britain and Northern Ireland highlight¹, the United Kingdom, in common with many other democracies, faces ongoing challenges in maintaining and extending participation rates. For example, turnout for national and EU parliamentary elections, whilst varying significantly between different states, suggest an average figure of around 70%². A number of smaller countries (Cyprus, Liechtenstein, Luxembourg, Malta) combined with Belgium (where voting is compulsory) and Denmark, raise the average. On the other hand some of the more recent member states such as Poland, Lithuania and Bulgaria reported notably low rates, with less than half of those registered voting.

1 [The Electoral Commission - The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain, published July 2014](#)

2 [Eurostat Voter turnout in national and EU parliamentary elections](#)

Turnout and voter registration are not synonymous: it is possible to have a high turnout with low registration, or low turnout with high registration, or other combinations. However, Electoral Commission research has found that people, especially highly mobile groups, register in order to vote, and their data shows that those who don't vote are significantly less likely to be on the register than those who do (69% vs 92%).

There may be a range of reasons for this, including oft-cited apathy or disengagement. Others may not see their vote as an agent of change. Some, such as Demos in their report '*Introducing Generation Citizen*'³ have argued that it is not lack of interest that deters young people from participating in the democratic process, but that they choose to bring about change in ways other than through the ballot box, for example by volunteering. However, some continue to assume that young people do not care about politics or see it as relevant to them, which may affect the way in which they are engaged.

Distrust of government's intentions in collecting data may influence some, although no decline is seen in census completion rates, suggesting that it isn't a significant factor across the population as a whole.

More notable is a rise in demographic factors that are known to affect registration rates, in particular a more mobile and diverse population. This suggests that, in contrast to previous eras, the dynamics of this change will present an ongoing challenge to a 'settled' register and require continued attention to maintaining completeness and accuracy.

The Government is tackling the challenge of engaging people across the whole of society in our democracy. This requires continuous effort in partnership with many different groups, using qualitative and quantitative evidence to identify barriers and solutions. The approach set out in this strategy is based on understanding the reasons for under registration and the steps that we can take to tackle these. It addresses the need for a citizen focused democracy, in which modern, fit for purpose processes support an active, participatory democratic society.

Chapter Two: Evidence Base for Voter Registration

(i) Knowledge Review

In order to achieve the Minister's vision for a democracy that works for everyone, the Government recognises the importance of working with local authorities and civil society organisations. Together we are better placed to reach out to under registered groups and vulnerable groups to improve the completeness and accuracy of the register.

To determine the most appropriate mechanisms to maximise registration it is necessary to

3 [Demos: Introducing Generation Citizen \(February 2014\)](#)

have a clear understanding of the barriers to registration faced by different groups. Cabinet Office has recently completed a review to answer the key question: *What are the barriers that currently prevent people from registering to vote and how do these impact particular Under Registered Groups and vulnerable groups?*

The review aimed to assess the extent to which we currently understand and can evidence answers to this question, with consideration to the level of evidence available regarding how the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration has shaped these barriers, and where the key gaps in our knowledge about these groups are.

The review focused on barriers to electoral registration for all electors and then for each of the following URGs:

- young people (particularly attainers and under 25s);
- frequent home movers (including: private renters, people in Houses of Multiple Occupancy (HMOs) and students);
- people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds groups; and
- people with a long-standing condition or disability

It also looked at whether there is evidence of any barriers to registration for other vulnerable groups (including: care home residents, homeless people, victims of domestic abuse, and people from areas with higher levels of social deprivation).

The original driver for this review was to provide a reference point for informing and prioritising civil society organisation initiatives to register under-registered groups and vulnerable groups. A few pieces of wider research were consulted but this is not, and does not intend to be, a systematic review of evidence. However, within scope is an overview of what we know already and the gaps in our understanding of the experience of a number of groups. The review also highlights the areas where sufficient insight exists to plan, develop and test new interventions aimed at increasing registration.

(ii) Overarching Barriers

We know that across the electorate as a whole there are a number of overarching barriers that may affect the likelihood of an individual registering to vote. These include:

Attitude

The Electoral Commission (2014) have previously shown that there is a correlation between completeness and attitude towards electoral registration.⁴ Those who feel they have a duty to register to vote are more likely to be registered than those who think it is not worth it (89% against 66%).

⁴ [The Electoral Commission - The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain, published July 2014](#)

Significant electoral events can impact register completeness and accuracy even over the course of a year. Just prior to the EU referendum in 2016, the Hansard Society audit of political engagement (Hansard Society, 2016) suggested that interest in, and knowledge of, politics had risen by eight percentage points from the previous year for the general population⁵.

The number claiming to be a strong supporter of a political party had risen by 11 percentage points to 41%, the highest level recorded in the Audit series, and 59% said they were certain to vote in the event of an election, which is 10 percentage points higher than the previous year. In addition, the then record numbers of people trying to register online the day before the EU referendum deadline (525,254) supports the notion that there was an increase in engagement with politics ahead of the referendum. This was further reinforced by the surge of interest ahead of the General Election in June 2017, which saw nearly 3 million applications to register within the campaign period, 622,000 of which were made on the deadline day.

The long-term effects of the EU referendum upon 'attitudes' and registration however, are not yet known. It may be that an increased interest in politics is relatively short lived and may decline in the following years, or it may have triggered a more long-lasting impact. In the past however, 'certainty to vote' has always dropped by the 18 month mark following an election (Hansard Society, 2007; 2012).

Knowledge

Prior to the EU referendum, there was a significant amount of public engagement work conducted around how to register to vote and the online registration process, which may have helped break down some of the knowledge barriers around this process. The record numbers of people who tried to register online the day before the EU referendum deadline however, suggests that whilst there may have been an increase in engagement with politics, there remained a lack of knowledge about the registration process. A number of applicants left comments in their online applications which suggested that uncertainty about what they needed to do to be eligible to vote in the 23 June Referendum was a factor in their decision to make an online application to register so late. Some comments for example, included:

- *"I went on line solely to register for the EU referendum & that's what I thought I was doing. I am already on the electoral roll at my current address, so I do not need anything to change in that respect."*
- *"Sorry. I've realised I have an electoral card (it was sent a couple of weeks ago and previously registered) that has been sent to me to vote. I don't need to register again or receive a new card. Please cancel this application."*
- *"Sorry, I wanted to register for the referendum regarding the EU not to register on the electoral register do I need to re-submit the details for that action?"*

5 [Audit of Political Engagement 13, The 2016 report, published Hansard Society, published in 2016](#)

- *“I do not need to register I am already registered to vote but thought I had to register again for the EU referendum.”*

(iii) Under Registered Groups

For each under registered group the knowledge review presents: a summary of key findings; an overview of the registration patterns for that group; a description of barriers to registration already identified along with information about how these prevent registration for that group; the key gaps in evidence; and recommendations for next steps including research questions that could be used if seeking to fill evidence gaps.

The review found that there was little or no evidence of what the barriers to registration are for: black and ethnic minorities; attainers; care home residents; homeless people; people with a long-standing mental or physical condition or disability; people living in areas of high social deprivation; and survivors of domestic abuse.

For young people and frequent home movers, some clear barriers were identified. These are two of the largest under registered groups.

- **Young people:** perceived low levels of engagement with politics compared to older groups. This is likely to magnify the impact of their lack of knowledge about the registration process and of the responsibility for self registration.
- **Frequent home movers:** low levels of motivation to register after moving, particularly during the canvass period when there are no major political events, and lack of understanding about the need to re-register when moving home.

In addition barriers were partially evidenced for other under registered groups:

- **Attainers:** (people who attain voting age during the currency of the register) have lower levels of registration than other young age groups, and the barriers are poorly evidenced and understood, but may possibly be related to attitude and knowledge. The EC have suggested that attainers may have little motivation to register to vote when they become eligible, because they cannot yet vote (EC, 2016).⁶ Knowledge is also likely to pose a barrier for attainers.
- **Students:** are significantly more likely to move than non-students (16% against 8% and previous completeness levels after the 2011 census suggest that students were under-registered at this time. Research has suggested that students are even less likely to re-register after moving than other groups (2% against 8%; EC, ⁷2014. Furthermore, the incentive for students to register when they move for the start of term is low, because they can register at both a permanent home address and a term-time address and advice from EROs on where they should register may differ by LA.

⁶ [The Electoral Commission - Assessment of December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain Published in February 2016](#)

⁷ [The Electoral Commission - The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in Great Britain July 2014](#)

Additionally, many students are not usually resident until late September or early October, and IER brought with it the removal of block registration for students, meaning that they have to be individually contacted. This leaves little time to begin and complete activities before 1 December (EC, 2016), particularly for a group which is less likely to be registered. However, the answer is not to return to block registration, which gave students little agency or control, but more sophisticated systems that enable those who are newly-enrolled to sign up at both their term time and home addresses.

For other under registered groups, there is little to no current evidence of what the barriers to registration are:

- **BME Groups:** Further research is needed to understand the barriers for BME groups post-IER, as well as how these differ across ethnic groups. We know that BME groups are less likely to be registered than those who give their ethnicity as 'White' however the most up-to-date detailed breakdown of register completeness relates to the 2011 registers, to coincide with detailed information being available from the census, and it is not known what the impact of IER has been on these groups. Barriers identified include: attitude and knowledge, and English language proficiency. It is likely however, that barriers will not be homogenous across all BME groups and there will be different reasons for lack of registration both within and between these groups. These barriers are still poorly understood, with inconclusive and contradictory findings.
- **People with a long-standing mental condition or disability:** This group is less likely to be registered than those with a long-standing physical condition or disability, and than the general population, however the barriers are poorly understood. Some of the barriers identified for this group include personal capability, access and attitude.
- **Other vulnerable groups:** 'Vulnerable people' are not one homogenous group, but rather a diverse range of different citizens who are vulnerable in different ways, and who will therefore have different barriers that prevent them from registering to vote. Vulnerable groups in this review included; people living in areas of high social deprivation, care home residents and homeless people, and survivors of domestic abuse. For some of these groups, there is little to no evidence on their levels of registration, and some may in fact turn out to have high levels of register completeness. However, until evidence is gathered, these groups should not be neglected and it is important to ensure these groups are as equally able to take part in the democratic process as the general population.

Current Understanding of Barriers to Registration

A knowledge review of barriers to registration was conducted in December 2016. The review identified key evidence gaps, where the barriers to registration for under-registered groups were based on pre-IER evidence, or not tested through robust research.

Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) groups - people self-reporting as Asian (80%), Mixed (77%), Black (76%) and 'Other' (73%) are significantly less likely to be correctly registered than those self-defining as White (85%) (EC, 2016)⁸ **Social renters** - private renters (57%) and social renters (78%) are much less likely to be registered than homeowners (95%), however the barriers for social renters are the least well understood. Clear barriers that have been identified for private renters are not as prevalent in social renters, such as frequent home movement and age.

People who live in areas of high social deprivation - data from the 2011 census shows that people living in areas of high social deprivation are likely to be under-registered (estimated completeness in the most deprived quartile was 83.0%, compared to 91.9% in the least deprived quartile), however this is now likely to be out of date. We do not know what the barriers for this group are, or whether IER or other policy changes could have reduced their register completeness.

Transgender individuals - there are no official statistics on registration rates for individuals identifying as transgender, and little evidence on the barriers to registration faced by this group.

People who are homeless - there are no official statistics on registration rates for the homeless, however research suggests areas with the highest levels of deprivation have lower completeness rates (83%) than the least deprived areas (92%) (EC, 2014)⁹.

Care Home residents - there are no official statistics on registration rates for care home residents, but research suggests the move from household registration (where care home managers could register all residents) to IER, has made this group particularly vulnerable to under-registration (GfK, 2012)¹⁰.

People with a long-standing mental or physical condition or disability - people with a long-standing mental condition or disability (76%) are less likely to be registered than the overall population (83%) while than those with a long-standing physical condition or disability (90%) are more likely to be registered. We have limited knowledge about the barriers for these groups, and we do not know if there are barriers specifically related to having a physical disability which impact the relatively small number of physically disabled people who are not registered.

8 [The Electoral Commission - The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain, published July 2016](#)

9 [The Electoral Commission - The quality of the 2014 electoral registers in the Great Britain, published July 2014](#)

10 [Under- registration Groups & Individual Electoral Registration, Prepared by GfK NOP, June 2012](#)

Attainers¹¹ - Attainers have very low levels of registration (45%)¹². This could be due to attitudinal or knowledge barriers, but the evidence is poor for this group.

Following the knowledge review, a number of new groups of interest were identified and a review was conducted to determine if these groups also required additional research:

- **Private vs. Social Renters:** The barriers to registration for social renters is under researched in comparison to private renters. Clear barriers that have been identified for private renters are not as prevalent in social renters. Frequent movement is not an apparent issue since according to Shelter in 2015 only 5% of social renters moved in 2015, which is only slightly higher than the 3% of homeowners who moved. Similarly, the English Housing Survey in 2015/16 shows that age is not such a defining factor, as under half as many young people are in social housing than private rented homes.
- **People for Whom English is a Second Language:** There is a lack of up to date research on the registration levels of non-English speaking individuals. Research suggests that language is likely to be a barrier when completing registration forms. Online registration may have improved this, however this has not been specifically tested.
- **Transgender Individuals:** The barriers are poorly understood, but some work suggests they may be related to complications around photo ID, and the additional work required to register along with creating knowledge and motivation barriers, as well as causing feelings of inequality due to the different processes involved.

In addition, there are other groups that Government will continue to support as part of its wider efforts to ensure all those who are eligible have an opportunity to participate in our democracy. This includes Armed Forces personnel, whose unique circumstances require bespoke communications. The Ministry of Defence (MoD) and Electoral Commission have been campaigning with the members of the Armed Forces personnel in the past, which explains the positive upward trend in registration levels.

The total strength of the Regular Forces in the UK and overseas is 151,840 people. In addition, there are 54,440 MoD civilian personnel in the UK and overseas, who are eligible to register as a service elector. The MoD publishes an annual Armed Forces Continuous Attitude

11 A definition of attainers can be found in chapter seven

12 Electoral Commission: The December 2015 Electoral Registers in Great Britain (2016)

Survey (AFCAS) which enquires the military personnel about their democratic participation. The registration level of 'Other ranks' (RAF, Army and Royal Marines) has shown a positive shift over the last few years. The registration level was 65% in 2014, 70% in 2015, 76% in 2016 and 81% in 2017. The registration level of Officers was even higher in 2017, 96%.

The knowledge review identified a number of knowledge gaps and therefore a need for future research to help identify and explain the barriers faced by selected under-registered and vulnerable groups, to shape democratic engagement policies and activities. We are therefore initiating a package of research to better understand the barriers to registration for people who: self-report as from black and minority ethnic backgrounds; are homeless; and care home residents.

Chapter Three: Insight into Registration Barriers

(i) Tackling Barriers Together

As the evidence shows, barriers to voter registration are many and varied. The range of groups that have lower than average rates suggests that there are multiple factors in play. In turn this confirms that there is no single solution to maximising registration, but that a toolkit of approaches is required in order to break down different barriers.

To get under the skin of the research we have been working with many different organisations that have first hand experience of engagement with under registered groups, sometimes to promote democratic participation as a primary goal but often on a range of different issues such as employment, money skills, apprenticeships and volunteering. Their insights are derived from understanding the needs of particular groups, the issues that have an impact on their lives and the opportunities available to them.

Often, an apparent lack of engagement is the result not of apathy but a focus on more pressing issues, lack of knowledge, less agency or impaired opportunity. Broadly, the barriers that we must address fall into three categories:

Access

For some the barrier is a practical one. It may be that they have limited access to the register to vote website, or do not feel confident navigating it. Or there may be physical barriers that deter participation, for example inability to easily locate their National Insurance number. Improving access for those who want to have their say but are discouraged by these hurdles is a priority. No-one who wants to exercise their democratic choice should be denied their lawful right as a result of difficulties arising from the registration system itself.

Process

Other barriers are related to the process itself and may not be directly identified by those groups most likely to be affected. For instance home movers may lose track of their registration status: this can be exacerbated by frequent changes of circumstance such as

short-term student tenancies. Some groups may be less likely to be captured by current canvass practices - something that we can work to improve. Getting the customer journey right is a really important part of the jigsaw.

Engagement

In addition to the challenge of improving access and processes, Government is committed to raising levels of engagement more generally. Many have considered how this is to be achieved and it is evident that there is no single answer to a complex question. However, with the support and involvement of partners there are many opportunities to harness the momentum seen prior to the EU Referendum and reach out to under registered groups in particular. A frequent suggestion is for greater focus on democratic education at a young age, and this, as well as a bottom-up approach to outreach, is key to this strategy.

(ii) Listening to Citizens

The statistics tell us about the broad picture and we have learned about the wider themes that underpin this data from qualitative research. However, speaking with a range of people from different backgrounds and areas of the country can provide a richer understanding of the motivations and concerns of individuals, as well as their ideas and observations.

Using the framework above, specific insights were sought through intensive engagement with a broad range of organisations and individuals. Part Three of this strategy sets out the approach to direct engagement with citizens and explores what their stories can tell us about democratic engagement in the digital age.

Chapter Four : Atlas of Democratic Variation

The Cabinet Office will also create an Atlas of Democratic Variation, using a wide range of electoral data, to demonstrate wider democratic engagement across local authorities.

Data can help shed light on how people engage with our democracy, including on a geographical level. While we can't draw a strong inference from all data, the more data we can make available the more likely we are to be able to better understand what is happening in each area

With time, data could help EROs understand the effectiveness of what they are doing, including compared to neighbours or similar authorities. We are therefore going to publish an atlas drawing out the information we have and encourage people to interrogate this data to see what conclusions they can draw from it.

A variety of registration and electoral data will be drawn upon and presented through interactive maps, helping to consider relationships between registration activity (such as applications to register to vote) or registration rates, and population demographics (in particular those groups known to be under registered) for geographical regions.

Rural/urban classifications can also be considered, with previous research by the Electoral Commission¹³ showing there are significant differences in electoral register completeness between rural and urban areas. The presentation of this data through maps will help establish whether there are any links between the rurality of an area and the current registration rate.

It has been recognised that there will be limitations to what can be concluded from this, given the nature of electoral registration, data currency and issues with identifying an eligible population, however maps will provide a good indication of areas of interest. In particular, there is potential to identify areas where certain under-registered groups have low levels of engagement with the democratic process, or areas where registration rates are particularly high across all population demographics.

With a growing interest in democratic patterns combined with the success of the current Register to Vote Live Service dashboard, there is scope to present the interactive maps in an online format where the public are able to engage with and compare democratic engagement in different local authorities. Work is underway and we intend to make the Atlas available in 2018.

Regional and Local Authority Electoral Registration Maps

We have already put some of our data onto maps. While each of the maps below has a slightly different key, the general principle is that an area filled with a darker shade indicates a higher number, whether this is a higher level of register completeness or a higher number of home movers in an area. In some cases there is a large variation in the data and a greater number of shades are used to help up identify the pattern. For other statistics, areas are more uniform, and fewer shades are needed.

Completeness of Electoral Registers

The Electoral Commission (EC) undertake adhoc assessments of the completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers using surveys of a nationally representative sample of the population and, in some years, census data along with statistical analysis. This assessment provides our most concrete understanding of the register completeness and accuracy. The most recent found that regions in the South of England, excluding London, display the highest levels of completeness. Completeness is just slightly lower in Scotland and the East of England. However, Wales and regions in the North of England have lower levels of completeness, notably at just 78% in the North East. However, this assessment will likely mask variation within a region.

13 [Electoral Commission, The December 2015 electoral registers in Great Britain, July 2016](#)

Estimating Rates of Registration

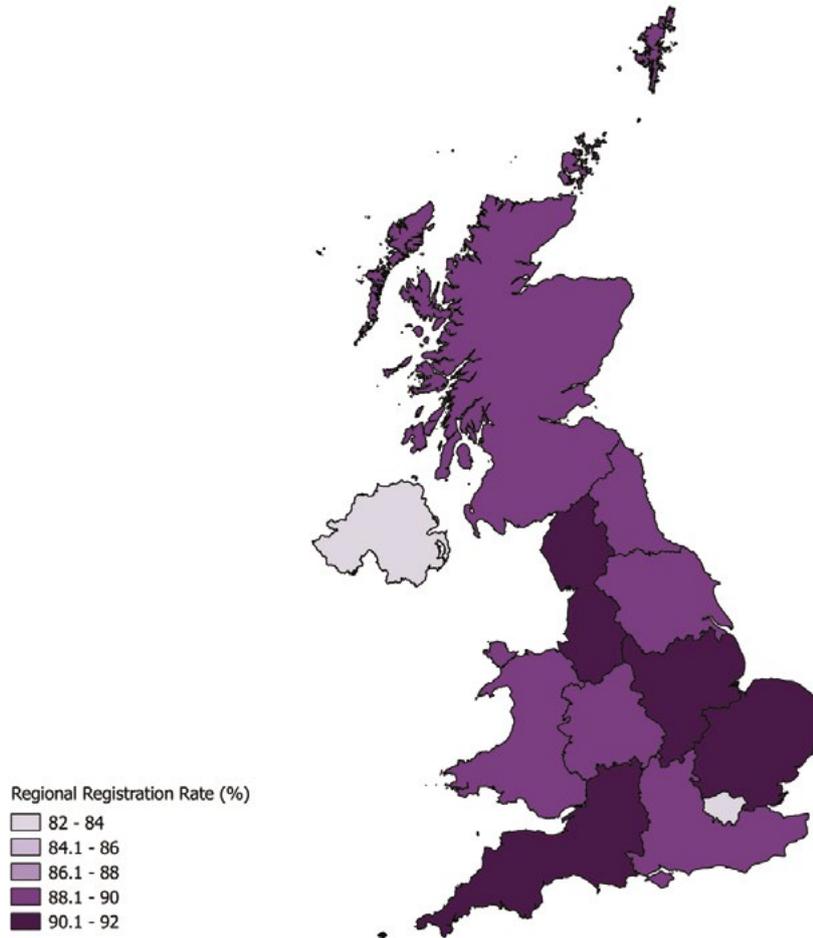
We can estimate the percentage of eligible electors who are registered in a given area by comparing the number of register entries with the population at voting age. This is possible at a local authority level as well as at a regional level.

There are some important limitations to this approach and these mean this is far from being a perfect indicator. For example, the latest population estimates are usually released a year after the point in time they relate to, which generally is not aligned to any register publication 'snapshot' and will include individuals who are not eligible to vote, for example on the basis of nationality. This is also a definitionally different measure to the completeness measure employed by the EC. These issues could explain differences between findings at a regional level for this approach and for the EC's, for example the North West, East Midlands and East of England are estimated to have higher rates of registration, yet the EC found these regions to have some of the lowest completeness rates.



Roundtable discussion on democratic inclusion and participation

Figure 2: Estimated Registration Rate by Region (Cabinet Office calculation using Office for National Statistics data) ^{16 17}



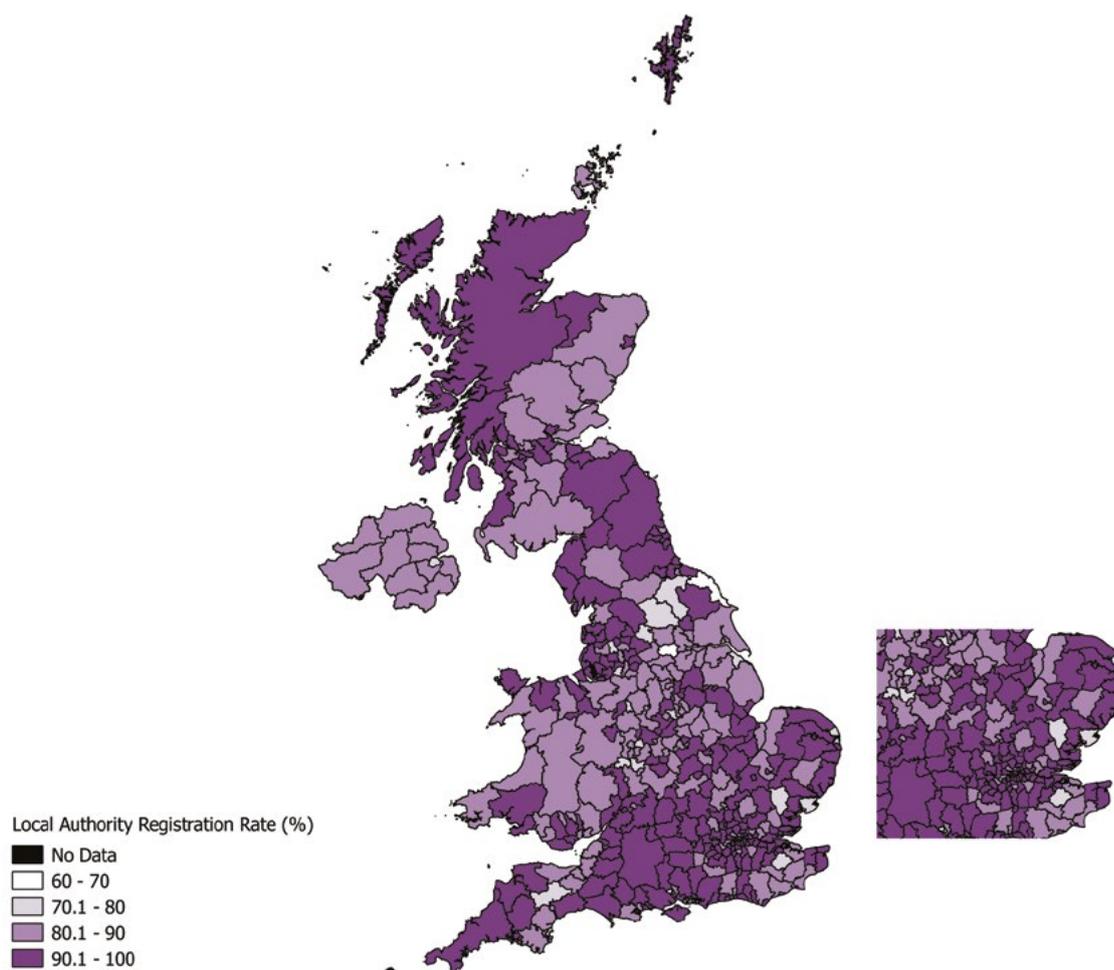
However, the benefits of this approach are that we can begin to assess whether there are specific local authority areas where registration rates are seemingly low. This is helpful in principle because electoral registration is managed at this administrative level, and Electoral Registration Officers may wish to use this indicator to gain insights into their local registration picture relative to others.

It also allows us to make comparisons with other data in a meaningful way, though of course more geographically granular data would be even better.

¹⁶ [Adapted from data from the Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 Local Government Electoral Registers December 2016](#)

¹⁷ [Adapted from data from the Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 Mid-Year Population Statistics 2016](#)

Figure 3: Estimated Registration Rate by Local Authority (Cabinet Office calculation using Office for National Statistics data)^{18 19}



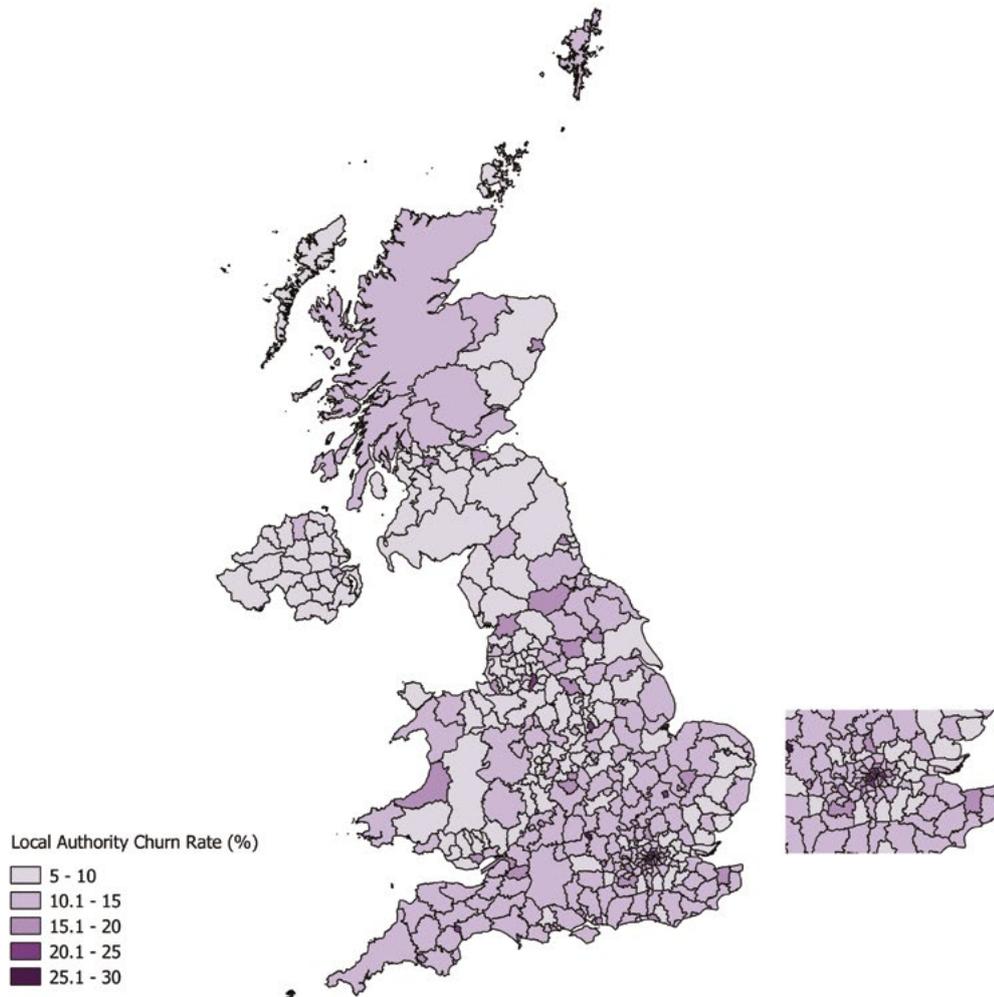
Using churn data, we are also able to identify potential links between churn levels and estimated registration rates. For example, areas with high churn in London also have lower rates of registration as seen in Figure 3.

However, it should be noted that areas with high churn may hold a number of ineligible electors that are unaccounted for within our data, so caution should be taken when suggesting a relationship between high churn and low registration rates.

18 [Adapted from data from the Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 Local Government Electoral Registers December 2016](#)

19 [Adapted from data from the Office for National Statistics licensed under the Open Government Licence v.3.0 Mid-Year Population Statistics 2016](#)

Figure 4: Estimated Churn Rate by Local Authority (Cabinet Office calculation using ONS data)^{20 21}



20 Data obtained from: Office for National Statistics, 2011 Census: Migration Statistics (United Kingdom). Downloaded from: <https://www.nomisweb.co.uk/census/2011/ukmig001>

21 Churn data is calculated using 2011 census data and is displayed against 2011 geographical boundaries. There have been several boundary changes across the United Kingdom during this time, but correct boundaries have been used for the year the data was published.

Part Two

Government Progress Towards An Inclusive Democracy

Chapter Five: Current Position

Elections belong to the people. It's their decision - Abraham Lincoln

(i) The importance of democratic engagement

A thriving democracy depends upon the participation of eligible electors. Their voices are the bedrock of a plural, representative system that reflects the will of the people. The foundations of our government, society and freedoms are made stronger when more people get involved.

Democratic engagement can take many forms: watching local council debates or attending MPs' surgeries; joining a mass protest or writing a letter to a newspaper; canvassing for a political party or sharing views on social media. Whether collective or individual, large or small, regular or intermittent, these assertions of interest in the decisions that shape our world underpin a vibrant and healthy democracy.

No democratic expression is more powerful, however, than exercising the right to vote. That is why it is a priority to ensure that we have the most complete and accurate electoral registers possible. The journey to the ballot box may start in a thousand ways but arriving at the polling booth depends upon inclusion on the electoral roll.

(ii) The Electoral Register

The electoral register (sometimes called the 'electoral roll') lists the names and addresses of everyone registered to vote in that area. People who are not registered cannot vote. The register is compiled and maintained by local electoral services teams. The Cabinet Office's digital service enables applications to be made online. Marks on the register indicate which elections an elector is eligible to vote in.

Responsibility for compiling the electoral registers lies with approximately 380 individual Electoral Registration Officers, known as EROs. The electoral register therefore actually comprises 380 electoral registers. Indeed, there are nearly 760 registers given that each local area maintains separate registers for local and parliamentary elections.

(iii) Completeness and Accuracy

The great majority of the electorate are already registered to vote and able to exercise their right to participate in polls if they wish. Whether viewed with political enthusiasm, seen as a civic duty or experienced as a rite of passage, it remains the norm for many millions.

Nevertheless a significant minority are missing out on having their say at elections. The completeness of the electoral register in Great Britain has been declining since this was first measured in 1966 (96%), with completeness levels declining dramatically after 2001 and falling to 85% in 2011.

Over the past 5 years, electoral register completeness has remained relatively stable and the latest report published by the Electoral Commission has shown that the Parliamentary registers in December 2015 were 85% complete and 91% accurate. The Commission has made clear that thanks to Individual Electoral Registration ‘the registers are now more accurate and secure as a result of the new system.’

The report on the December 2015 registers - which was published in July 2016 - was the final instalment of a research programme²² conducted by the Electoral Commission designed to measure the impact of the transition to individual electoral registration. The Electoral Commission states that during the transition to IER - 10 June 2014 to 1 December 2015 - the overall accuracy of the registers increased by an estimated four percentage points.

Given that Northern Ireland introduced a system of individual electoral registration in 2002, the EC have produced separate reports on the completeness and accuracy of their register²³. However the overall picture in Northern Ireland tallies with Great Britain.

The levelling out in register completeness in Great Britain did not apply to all groups of people, with some experiencing a decline, including since the transition from household registration to IER.

We know that electoral registration is not constant or even over the course of a year. It is also clear that significant electoral events can impact register completeness and accuracy. But the Electoral Commission report on the December 2015 registers in Great Britain estimated between 6.7 and 7.3 million eligible people were not correctly registered to vote at their current address.

Completeness and accuracy remain a key priority within the Government’s plans for an electoral registration system in which every voice matters. The Minister for the Constitution will continue to work with partners to modernise the process of registration at the same time as addressing barriers to participation in our democracy.

²² [Electoral Commission, Research on Accuracy and Completeness of the Electoral Registers](#)

²³ [Electoral Commission, Research on Accuracy and Completeness of the Electoral Register in Northern Ireland](#)

(iv) Individual Electoral Registration

In 2014 the outdated 'household registration' system in Great Britain was replaced to give each individual control over their own registration. The new system is called Individual Electoral Registration (IER). You can now register to vote online in as little as three minutes. All anyone needs is their name, address, date of birth and (ideally) their National Insurance number.

Since the introduction of IER we have witnessed how seriously registration is taken by individuals, parliamentarians, government and civil society organisations.

In a little over two years we have processed more than 30 million applications to register. Of these, around three quarters have been made fully online. The speed and ease of the online service has greatly facilitated the transition to IER and encouraged many new applications, with interest sustained over time and peaking dramatically in the run up to registration deadlines. This clearly demonstrates the responsibility that individuals take for safeguarding their voting rights and the efficacy of communications that encourage them to register on time.

The Government is pushing even harder to reach those who are not currently on the register. This includes working with the wider electoral community and civil society organisations to develop a multidimensional approach to engagement in the context of IER. We are clear that we will not go back to outdated methods of household or 'block' registration. Rather, we will focus on continuing to maximise the clear benefits of the individual system.

(v) Pre- EU Referendum Activity

Prior to the referendum, a total of £3 million was allocated to the 40 Local Authorities in Great Britain with the highest levels of under registration to support them with the costs of activities aimed at boosting the number of electors registered in the area ahead of the EU Referendum. A further £1 million was allocated among the top 40 local authorities who were facing additional administrative pressures in terms of processing voter registration applications. Funding was mainly used for communications and advertising activity to amplify the Electoral Commission's public awareness campaign.

In addition £500,000 was allocated to eight national civil society organisations to increase awareness of voter registration between 6 and 26 May. Activity included paid-for social media advertising, 'street team' voter registration drives, targeted mailings, and a press awareness campaign.

This activity contributed to unprecedented levels of registration, driven by a once in a generation electoral event :

- 2.9 million applications to register to vote from 6 May to 9 June
- 1.6 million of these applications were from under 35s
- 96% of applications were made online, with 58 million visitors to the register to vote site over the campaign period
- more than a million additions to the register in Great Britain from 15 May until the extended registration deadline of 9 June.
- 135,396 additional registrations from overseas from 17 March until 9 June, an increase of 156% compared to the same period prior to the deadline for the 2015 General Election.

(vi) EU Referendum Register

46.5 million people were registered to vote for the EU Referendum, making the electoral register the largest it had ever been. More people than ever before were aware that their voice matters in our democratic process.

The EU Referendum was the largest single exercise in democracy that modern British politics has ever witnessed, with nearly three quarters of the electorate casting their vote. The unprecedented levels of participation in the EU Referendum demonstrated that the British public retain faith that their vote does count and that our democracy can still change the world around us.

(vii) UK Parliamentary General Election, June 2017

The success of the pre-EU Referendum communications campaign demonstrated the impact that coordinated communications activity can have on driving voter registration. As recommended by the Electoral Commission²⁴, the Government continued to utilise its unique channels to reach under registered groups ahead of polls.

The experience and insights gleaned from the EU referendum campaign played a crucial role in informing the preparations for the 2017 General Election, particularly given the relatively short notice for the poll. The success of the campaign is borne out in the data which shows sustained, high levels of engagement in voter registration. Almost 3 million applications to register were submitted following the announcement on 18th April, including a record of over 622,000 on the registration deadline itself. Moreover, under 25s showed unprecedented engagement in the democratic process as they submitted over 1 million applications in this period (representing over 35% of all applications).

24 [EC report on May 2016 elections and EU Referendum](#)

Following the deadline for applications, the electoral register for the 2017 General Election reached a record level of 46.8 million electors.

Registrations

There were 1.94m applications to register to vote during the campaign period of 5 to 22 May. The deadline saw the highest number of applications ever in one day, at 622,000.

Cross-government democracy campaign group

Together, colleagues from across government reached over 2.25m on social media.

Overseas voters

The Ministry of Defence (MOD) cascaded tailored partner packs to their TLBs to reach service personnel living overseas. MOD social media reached over 120,000 people, with more than 1000 engagements.

4,725 service personnel applied to register to vote online. FCO mobilised over 200 overseas posts, creating 662 mentions of the campaign worldwide and 530 applications to register to vote from overseas.

GOV.UK

More than 3,000 people clicked the 'register to vote' button on a Government transaction page, with over half coming from driving license applications suggesting a younger audience clicked through.

We will continue to learn from recent voter registration campaigns and work in partnership with others to make the widest possible impact. In particular we will work closely with local authorities, civil society organisations and the wider electoral community to engage under registered groups, encourage pooling of resources and facilitate sharing best practice.

Chapter Six: The Approach - improved processes, enhanced engagement

Securing a democracy fit for the 21st century is a multi-stranded undertaking. Much has already been achieved, both in terms of process (IER was the biggest change to the registration system for a century) and engagement (including funding for the public and civil society sectors, new education resources and communications campaigns). The two are closely linked, as participation is facilitated by citizen focused services that provide a friction-free interface with the democratic process.

There is continued opportunity for improvement and the Government is committed to incremental change which helps support democratic engagement. The evolving nature of our society, technology and participation means that this will not stand still and we should anticipate the need to constantly adapt and develop. The approach set out here explores the key areas where modernisation is currently focused.

(i) Enhancing the IER Digital Service

The Government is committed to making the system of electoral registration even more convenient, accessible and user friendly in order to improve the customer experience and encourage optimal levels of applications and registrations. The recent review of the Register to Vote website is part of this wider process aimed at putting the citizen at the centre of the registration system.

Website Review

A key theme of this strategy is putting the citizen at the centre of our democracy. As the first point of contact with the registration system for millions of people, making the digital service the best in the world is essential to this aim.

We have been conducting a review of the registration website. This has included analysing feedback from stakeholders on the register to vote website and in response is implementing changes to improve the user journey and experience of applying to register to vote. A key area of focus is establishing the potential to both reduce duplicate applications and to reduce confusion among some users between registering to vote online and the absent vote process. The EC, the AEA and SAA and our advisory board - the Practitioner Panel - have already been engaged and we will continue to work with the electoral community to test potential changes to messaging in the user journey, alongside user testing.

The website review will ensure that the register to vote service is as simple as possible to understand and use, regardless of whether you are an overseas or UK based voter. In addition we have been testing the site to ensure that it meets the most up to date accessibility standards and this is something we are continually addressing. We will announce the outcome of the review once it has been fully completed.

Duplicates Project

The development of an online digital service has been transformational, supporting a fundamental change in the way citizens interact with the registration system. The easy to use interface and round the clock availability has made applying to join the register quicker and easier than ever before. The success of this customer-led approach is seen in the record numbers that have registered since the launch of the Register To Vote website, and we will continue to ensure that the website is as user friendly, accessible and easy to use as possible.

There is good evidence from electoral administrators that, as a result of this high volume of customer interactions, recent major elections have seen a significant number of duplicate applications. We acknowledge that this has an impact on both citizens and administrators and are keen to minimise unnecessary applications for the benefit of all.

Because the website is so convenient and quick to use, many citizens, who were unsure if they were already registered, were making new applications to register to vote. This has the advantage of providing certainty to citizens. But it comes at a cost for electoral administrators who are already hard pressed in the run up to elections.

The Government has taken action aimed at reducing duplicate applications and the administrative burden they represent for electoral administrators. For example, during the 2017 General Election campaign, we added a new page to the register to vote website which encouraged people to make an application only when strictly necessary. The Government has also conducted extensive exploratory work in order to answer key questions, such as how frequently duplicate applications are generated each month and what is the cost of processing a duplicate application to local authorities. This helped to understand the impact, scale and cost of processing duplicate applications. It also allowed for next stage of the project which focused on establishing the feasibility of implementing an online lookup tool which would allow citizens to check their registration status in real time. This exploratory work found that the potential costs of a look-up tool - tens of £ millions - far exceed the costs of processing duplicate applications. There is also no obvious solution to the technical barriers to implementation. Both factors point towards needing to find an alternative solution, most likely implemented at a local level.

The Government remains committed to working with the electoral community to look at what practicable solutions exist to help reduce the administrative burden associated with duplicates.

(ii) Improving the current framework for electoral registration

Making the system of electoral registration more efficient by developing cost effective approaches to maintaining the completeness and accuracy of their registers, compared with the current annual canvass process, is a key ambition. This includes reducing the level

of prescription and regulation around electoral registration to enable EROs to determine the best methods for their areas and develop more innovative approaches; and moving to a system where EROs, in maintaining the completeness and accuracy of their registers, can demonstrate outcomes as opposed to outputs. One such area is the annual canvass, where new approaches are currently being tested.

Sharing Good Practice

To support the improvement of electoral registration outcomes it is important for the electoral community to share and see information on what does or does not work. With potentially fewer restrictions over canvass processes in the future we also expect that the need for evidence of what works and in what circumstances will be much greater and that we will see continuous development of good practice. The objectives for sharing good practice include ensuring that work complements the drive to modernise the overall approach to electoral services performance management, itself an issue linked to possible future change to the annual canvass.

The EC and AEA are leading on activity to promote and develop sharing good practice. Cabinet Office will continue to play an important role as a partner in this work to track progress of these activities so that the benefits can be fully understood and realised. There is a mixture of approaches to this work which includes sharing good practice at AEA branch meetings to provoke discussion and debate and online through the Electoral Commission website.

The Electoral Commission developed and published a resource, *The Use of Tablets in Electoral Registration* in March 2017 to align with administrators likely planning and budgeting timelines. They followed this in June 2017 with a suite of resources which shared specific examples of good practice in electoral registration, including: Communications; Effective personal canvassing; Encouraging responses; Effective management of registration processes; Effective use of available data; Reaching care home residents; and reaching students. These and further information on identifying and sharing good practice are available from the Electoral Commission website²⁵.

The Electoral Commission is continuing to identify and share good practice examples - and actively encourage their use as part of the ongoing support provided to EROs and administrators.

25 [Electoral Commission sharing good practice guides](#)

Whilst the Electoral Commission have provided examples we have gathered a collection of different approaches taken by Higher Education providers to promote voter registration including giving their students an opportunity to register to vote. These can be found at Annex A.

In evaluating this activity the aim is to arrive at good qualitative information on how the resources are received and where possible improvements might be made. This will then feed into any resource updates.

In conjunction with the AEA and EC we will keep this work under review, with a view to incorporating other areas of good practice and examples for wider dissemination and use by administrators and assessing the impact of this work.

Canvass Modernisation

Work is ongoing to identify opportunities to modernise the annual canvass, which sees every household in the country contacted to establish who should be registered to vote. The 2017 Canvass Pilots Project aims to demonstrate that there are alternative approaches for Local Authorities to conduct the annual canvass process that are effective and efficient.

The introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) and the online application process has led to changes in the way that electors engage with electoral registration and we need to reflect this change in modernising the annual canvass. The electoral community has raised concerns that the current prescribed process is not the most effective method to conduct the canvass. Having the option of alternative canvassing techniques will enable Electoral Registration Officers to use the methods they feel would be the most effective for their demographic and give them the flexibility to use their resources more effectively.

24 local authorities across Great Britain have been selected to pilot these new models during the 2017 annual canvass, now nearing completion. This builds on pilots with three Local Authorities in 2016. Those local authorities taking part will be testing one of four different models, which were based on suggestions by local authorities as better ways to run the annual canvass. Each model aims to make the canvass more efficient by utilising more varied communication methods, such as email, or by simplifying the existing approach for the citizen. Our aim is to test how effective these models are in capturing information on population churn and to understand how much more cost efficient the models may be compared with the current prescribed canvass process.

These pilots will provide an evidence base on the potential to reform the canvass in this Parliament. Changing the current prescriptive canvass process would give all Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain greater discretion to canvass in more effective or efficient ways, according to their local circumstances and demographic. Reducing costs and administrative burdens associated with the current approach would increase the capacity of Electoral Registration Offices to target their resources more effectively at the under registered groups who require extra support.

The pilots were run on a smaller scales with 3 Local Authorities in 2016 and have already started to show significant savings being realised. Extrapolating from evidence to date, it is clear that there is significant potential for savings, in the range of £20m per annum. Final decisions on future reforms will be based on the best evidence, which we are investing heavily in now, and will reflect our commitment to a system that is both efficient and effective.

(iii) Integrity of the electoral system

The Government is committed to strengthening our electoral processes and enhancing public confidence in the rigour of our democratic processes. The wellbeing of the democratic process is dependent on a clear and secure system that people can believe in. Votes are a fundamental right and that should not be undermined by fraud, coercion or other illegal acts. It is vital that electors, the wider public and our international partners can trust the outcome of elections. This is essential to the legitimacy of all governments and confidence in elected members. Failure to uphold high standards of integrity within the electoral system - and maintain widespread confidence that elections are free and fair - risks a pernicious undermining of the foundations of our democratic system. That creates a danger for our way of life and risks eroding engagement and diminishing participation. It is in everybody's interests that processes that defend against interference and are demonstrably robust.

Consequently the Minister for the Constitution has established a trilateral meeting with the NPCC and EC which convenes every six months to discuss electoral integrity issues. This is supported by the cabinet Office Electoral Integrity Project Board.

Together, these are taking forward a package of measures highlighted in the Government's response to Sir Eric Pickles' report on electoral fraud, published in December 2016.²⁶

Introducing a new requirement for voters to produce identification (ID) at polling stations is one way of delivering our commitment to making the system more secure.

26 [HMG: Securing the ballot: report into Sir Eric Pickles' review into electoral fraud](#) (August 2016)

Voter Identification and postal voting pilots

The Minister for the Constitution Chris Skidmore announced on 16 September 2017 that voters in a number of local authorities will need to show ID before they can vote next May in a move to tackle electoral fraud. Woking, Gosport, Bromley, Watford and Swindon have volunteered to take part in the trial, which will require voters to produce ID before being issued with a ballot paper.

The form of identification to be used will be set by the local authorities in collaboration with the Cabinet Office and with scrutiny from the Cabinet Office Electoral Integrity Project Board including in its membership the Electoral Commission and Association of Electoral Administrators. Pilots will trial a range of photo ID and non-photo ID and evaluation by the Electoral Commission, the pilot authorities and the Cabinet Office will enable the Government to identify the most effective way in which to implement voter ID nationally. Cabinet Office is working closely with the pilot authorities to ensure that the requirement to provide identity does not disenfranchise any eligible voter. Tower Hamlets and Peterborough will run separate postal voting pilots to test measures to improve the integrity of the postal vote process. Building on the recommendations of the Pickles Review the postal vote pilots in May 2018 will enable evaluation of improvements to monitoring the postal vote application process and the impact of providing better information and guidance to electors who have any concerns about the integrity of the end to end process that enables remote voting.

All the pilots are being overseen by the Cabinet Office Electoral Integrity Project Board and its members, including the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators and other local authorities not actively piloting at elections in May 2018.

We have also established an Electoral Integrity Project Board. Local authorities in this Group are working with the Cabinet Office, the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators to ensure a shared approach to delivering successful pilots. The pilots will be subject to evaluation under its statutory duty by the Electoral Commission.

We anticipate further pilots in May 2019 to building on those in 2018 to refine the design and delivery of voter ID at polling stations.

Boundary Reform

The Government is committed to delivering more equal and updated boundaries. The independent and impartial Boundary Commissions are currently conducting the boundary review in accordance with rules agreed in the 2010-15 Parliament.

The Boundary Commissions are due to report to Government in September 2018 with their final proposals for revised constituencies.

We are committed to ensuring fair and equal representation for the voting public across the UK. Without any boundary reforms, constituencies would be based on data that is over 20 years' old. This would disregard significant changes in demographics, house building and migration.

Multiple Registrations and Voting More Than Once

A firm but proportionate response to allegations of breaches in our democratic process is vital in maintaining public confidence in the integrity of our democracy. Following the 2017 General Election, reports circulated on social media of individuals voting twice. As with anything that raises doubts as to the integrity of our electoral system, the Government takes these allegations very seriously and is exploring ways that the risk of double voting can be reduced in the future.

Allegations of students voting twice in the General Election 2017

It is lawful for an elector who is resident at more than one address to be registered to vote at more than one address. It is, however, an offence to vote more than once in an election to any one elected body, such as at a UK Parliamentary general election. Conviction of such an illegal practice carries a financial penalty.

Following reports from social media of individuals voting twice in the General Election 2017, the Minister for the Constitution held priority discussions with the Electoral Commission, Crimestoppers and the Association of Electoral Administrators. The Minister for the Constitution wrote to the National Police Chiefs' Council (NPCC) lead on electoral fraud and malpractice, reiterating his support for the police in their efforts to investigate reports of criminal behaviour in relation to elections.

The Minister has also met with the Electoral Commission and NPCC to discuss this issue further. The NPCC confirmed that police forces had made thorough and comprehensive efforts to investigate any reported cases of double voting. The NPCC confirmed that police received a very small number of reports, focused on comments made by individuals on social media. Some investigations were brought to a quick close when it became clear individuals had acted as a proxy for another voter.

There are still live investigations. Should prosecutions arise once the remaining investigations close, we will look to publicise the outcome to demonstrate that those who vote illegally will be held to account for their actions.

The Government is clear that any action that undermines the integrity of our democratic processes is unacceptable. The Government will work with the Electoral Commission and other partners to ensure that more is done to make sure the public is aware that voting twice at a single poll - such as a general election - will not be tolerated. We will also continue to press for reports of allegations of double voting to be investigated by the police so that those responsible can be held to account.

Chapter Seven: A Democracy That Works for Everyone

(i) Overview

The Government is committed to building a fair, secure and inclusive democracy that works for everyone. This is critical to our society's expectations and democratic identity, but it is a complex and ever-evolving challenge.

The importance of a robust system capable of supporting mass voter engagement was highlighted most recently at the EU Referendum. Out of this unique electoral event came another, less well noted, result: with 46.5 million people registered to vote, the register was the largest yet recorded. More people than ever before signed up to have their say in our democratic process. Most did so online using the Government's Register to Vote website, including 85% of 18-24 year olds. Applications via the digital service from UK electors resident abroad more than doubled from 111,000 in 2015 to 272,000 in 2016.

That remarkable achievement was a testament not only to unprecedented exposure of the register to vote message throughout the Referendum campaign, but also dedication to collaborative working. A partnership approach is the mainstay of the Democracy That Works for Everyone campaign, which fully involves partner organisations in developing messages and disseminating them through their channels.

(ii) Democratic Engagement Partners

Evaluation of this success points to a number of challenges for the future, in particular ensuring that those who are less likely to be on the electoral register have an opportunity to make their mark in the democratic process. The young; frequent home movers; and people from BME backgrounds are at higher than average risk of missing out on having their say at elections.

The nature of these challenges means that no one sector has all of the answers. Solutions lie within crucial partnerships between central government and local authorities; civil society groups and the private sector; public bodies and the wider electoral community. The centre has a key role to play in identifying solutions that can be applied locally and sharing the best ideas so that they can be adopted by others.

iii) Challenges

First, maintaining the momentum generated by the EU Referendum and 2017

General Election. It is clear that faith in the power of democracy to drive change is alive and well. Nearly three quarters of the electorate cast their vote, the largest single exercise in democracy that modern British politics has ever witnessed. Maintaining this level of democratic engagement will require even closer working, innovation and creative thinking. We are working with partners across Whitehall to amplify the Electoral Commission's local elections campaign and support DCLG's Mayoral Elections Awareness Campaign.

Second, that new ideas are needed to ensure further progress towards a more complete and accurate electoral register. A combination of factors - such as a more mobile population that use increasingly diverse communications channels - are testing our current systems. We need to consider whether different approaches - to running the canvass for example - have the potential to make registration activity more efficient and sustainable. Our communications activity supports the Modern Registration Programme, promoting improvements to the system and seeking fresh thinking from our many stakeholders.

Third, that to create a democracy that works for everyone we must remove the barriers that deter some groups from registering to vote. The Government believes that every voice matters, but many people continue to miss out on having their say, in particular people from some Black and minority ethnic groups, those who move house frequently, young people, and those with a longstanding mental health condition or disability. British citizens living overseas are particularly under registered.

Identifying Barriers: Home Movers Project

Research carried out by the Electoral Commission has painted a vivid picture – electoral registration by all types of home movers could and should be a lot higher.

A simple Google search for statistics illustrates how home movers are moving into new property more frequently and with greater volume. For example, the English Housing Survey

indicated that there has been an increase of over 20% in the number of people aged 25 – 34 living in the private rented sector from 2004/05 – 2014/15.²⁷

According to DCLG statistics in 2014, In England there are over 2.3 million households rented from housing associations and 1.6 million rented from local authorities. In addition there the same report indicated that 59,000 homeless households were living in temporary accommodation at the end of June 2014²⁸.

This is of course just the tip of the iceberg in regards to the various types of home mover groups, however, what this is demonstrating is how transient our population actually is. And of course, Electoral Administrators will be acutely aware that citizens who have been living at their property for over three years are more likely to be registered to vote than those without.

Therefore it is imperative that our democratic process adapts to these needs and ensure when elections do come around the transient population are equipped to have their say. That is why The Government is keen to understand how electoral registration could become part of the process of moving house and collaborative work with local authorities and the housing sector will be imperative to this.

With that in mind, a discovery exercise, which is currently at its initial stage, is extensively investigating the barriers home movers encounter when re-registering on the electoral register and data led solutions to address these barriers. The culmination of the exercise will result in the potential viability of these solutions and recommendations for the next steps to enhance voter registration for home movers in the near future.

As part of his Every Voice Matters tour, the Minister for the Constitution, has met with various housing associations and homeless organisations to further understand the barriers their tenants face to engage in the democratic process. In addition for the organisations to explain the most effective engagement methods to promote voter registration to their tenants.

For example during his visit to Yorkshire in December 2016, the Minister met with prominent housing associations in the area, such as South Yorkshire Housing Association. He was informed that potential routes to encourage voter registration could included incorporating a link to registering to vote when the resident is applying for housing. In addition using the presence of incentives, such as prize draws or vouchers, could help their tenants to engage more and register to vote.

The home movers project will propose a series recommendations at the conclusion of the discovery phase. The short term recommendations, which can be delivered within the current legislative framework will be progressed throughout 2018. The longer term recommendations, which require fundamental change in processes will form part of the conversation of wider changes to the registration process, following on from the 2016 and 2017 canvass pilots.

27 [Department for Communities and Local Government, English Housing Survey, Private rented sector report 2014 - 15, published in February 2016](#)

28 [Department for Communities and Local Government English Housing Survey, Households report 2013 -14 published in July 2015, Revised September 2015](#)

Testing Approaches to Maximising Registration in the Future

The Minister for the Constitution has heard in person from representatives of under-registered and vulnerable groups about their views on electoral registration, voting and barriers to political participation.

Building on the momentum of the EU Referendum voter registration campaign the Minister met with over 150 organisations across the UK during his Every Voice Matters tour.

These groups represent a wide range of community and advocacy networks, including those working with young people, students, homeless persons, care home residents and managers, disability groups, housing associations, Black and Minority Ethnic groups, survivors of domestic abuse, and Electoral Registration Officers. The Minister's tour has opened a dialogue between the Government and civil society organisations, which was well-received by the sector.

We will take the findings from future research commissions and previous learning to consider where we can work with the sector to design appropriate solutions ahead of future elections to maximise the numbers of people on the electoral registers.

Civil society organisations have built extensive networks and positions of trust in their local communities, which could greatly complement the work electoral registration services do. The Government will consider how we work together with community and voluntary sector organisations to identify and design solutions ahead of the next planned General Election to maximise the completeness and accuracy of electoral registers.

(iv) Challenging Democratic Exclusion

Inclusion is a central issue in creating a democracy that works for everyone. The Government's vision for democratic engagement is that every voice matters: we will reach out to all communities, including those who feel socially excluded, to encourage and empower them to have their say - ensuring no community is left behind.

Developing a more inclusive democracy may have many starting places and individuals may not necessarily experience it as a linear journey. For some it might begin with a conversation about what matters to them in their daily lives, progressing at a later date to greater awareness of how to influence these through local and national democratic processes. Others may be activists or campaigners, yet to engage in more formal channels. Particular groups may need practical changes to help them overcome barriers to participation, despite being keen to play an active role. It is not only about registration and participation in elections - important though these are - but a wider sense of connection with the conversations and choices that shape society.

The available evidence, explored in Part One, shows that some groups are more vulnerable to exclusion than others. Further research will seek to better understand the barriers that are

relevant to those who self-report as black and minority ethnic; are homeless; and care home residents. In addition, initial exploration has helped to improve our knowledge of the factors that deter other groups such as survivors of domestic abuse. Their experience illustrates how exclusion can arise from circumstances beyond the control of the individual, in this case the risk of identification and reprisal, and is reinforced by processes that are too onerous or complex to navigate.

Attainers

Attainers are one of the most under registered groups, with many missing out on the opportunity to register to vote. This could be for a variety of reasons: United Kingdom the Parliamentary voting age is 18 and 16 and 17 year olds may not realise that they can 'pre-register' pending the first election following their 18th birthday. For local elections in Scotland the age for attainers is 14 onwards . Many young people may be focused on their education, or perhaps have not been actively involved in discussion about politics. Whatever the cause, there are still many people in this age group who are registered, some of whom already feel passionately about helping their peers understand what democracy can do for them.

Exclusion from our democracy affects not only individuals but whole communities, so it is important to identify and challenge it where it arises. It is unfair that people silenced by their abusers should have their political voice taken away; it is wrong that people who have contributed to society throughout their lifetime should lose the opportunity to vote because they have moved into a care home; it potentially undermines the long term health of our democracy if new generations or particular ethnic groups are not included in the debates and decisions that affect their wellbeing and future life chances. No elector should feel that decisions that affect them are being taken without an opportunity for them to input.

Above all, inclusion is the foundation of our modern democracy - enshrined in the principle of an equal say, an equal vote - and to promote it is to protect these values. Civil and political discourse within our society rests on our democratic traditions and practices: maintaining that confidence by encouraging people to make their stake is essential to cohesion and legitimacy.

Young People aged 16+

Whilst attainers and first time voters are separate groups for the purposes of measuring electoral registration, a broader demographic group aged 16-24 share several generational characteristics. These are true digital natives, distinguished from older age groups by their lifelong familiarity with interactive technology and social media. The political landscape they will navigate is fundamentally different from that which has gone before, reflecting for example the changing nature of the party system; the challenges and opportunities of devolution; and the enhanced significance of identity politics. Many in this cohort will be more likely to belong to other under registered groups: from an ethnic minority background for example, or a frequent home mover. Young people themselves are often best placed to articulate the importance of democratic engagement in this fast-changing environment and explain why registering to vote empowers them.

Youth turnout is at a 25-year high - an estimated 67% - an increase of 16 percentage points on 2015. The Government will continue to work with local authorities as well as civil society organisations and education providers to ascertain good practice to inform our future policy recommendations in this area.

(v) Promoting Democratic Inclusion

Over the last few months the Minister for the Constitution has heard first hand from more than 150 organisations and individuals on a tour that will visit every country and region of the United Kingdom. This has generated a wealth of personal testimony and ideas for change., .

This next section sets out a number of activities that will help to address the barriers identified. These commitments will be the focus of much of our activity over the next 12 months, as we initiate new schemes and opportunities designed to encourage democratic engagement. This includes promoting the voter registration message to target audiences, but also reflecting on the reasons for exclusion and addressing them where possible.

Anonymous Registration

Anonymous registration is meant to protect the safety of people who would be at risk if their name and address appeared on the electoral register. We invited domestic abuse charities and electoral administrators to a roundtable event with the Minister in October 2016 to discuss the issue. From this we learnt powerful lessons about the difficulties and barriers the survivors of domestic abuse face through the process.

Some survivors find the information they need to provide is too complex. Others do not have access to the people who could attest about risks to their safety. These challenges sometimes lead them to decide the easiest thing to do is to not register to

vote. The Minister has been firm that this cannot continue. Survivors of abuse should be able to register with confidence using an accessible and secure system of anonymous registration.

We worked with Women's Aid, the Electoral Commission and electoral administrators to develop reforms to improve access to the scheme for survivors of domestic abuse. Through working with them, we considered the types of people and documentation survivors of abuse would be likely to have access to in their journeys to safety.

On 3 March 2017 we published a policy statement setting out our proposed reforms to the evidentiary requirements for anonymous registration. We welcomed feedback on the proposals from all interested parties.

Women's Aid estimated that the proposals in the policy statement could help thousands of survivors of domestic abuse. Mehala Osborne, a survivor of abuse who campaigned for reform to anonymous registration, said:

I was denied a vote whilst living in a refuge, and I never realised how much having a vote meant until it was taken away from me. I had already been through enough, and to be disempowered even more was so difficult. I am so proud to have started the campaign that has led to these proposed changes. Survivors in the future will not be denied their voice and democratic right to vote.

The feedback to the policy statement was positive from a cross section of organisations involved in anonymous registration including domestic abuse charities and electoral administrators. Using their valuable insights we are going to make changes to the evidence requirements so that they are more accessible and reflective of a survivor's real life experience of escaping abuse.

On 3 September 2017, the Government published its response to the feedback received on its policy statement. The Government announced that it would expand the types of acceptable documentary evidence and widen the types of people who can attest that a person's safety is at risk for an anonymous registration application. We will look to work with the Electoral Commission and relevant professional bodies to provide guidance as required.

Armed Forces Electors

Armed forces are a unique group in the electoral registration landscape: the registration challenges presented by high levels of mobility have been met with a determined and ground breaking response by the MOD and Armed Forces. To ensure that service personnel's voices are heard they are equipped with a number of ways to have their say in the democratic process.

Members of the Armed Forces, Ministry of Defence staff, their spouses and children frequently move around between posts both in the UK and abroad. They can apply to register to vote easily as a service elector, which allows them to use a fixed address even if they lived temporarily elsewhere. Alternatively they can choose to register as ordinary or overseas elector, if that is more suitable for their life situation.

Though the system is easy for citizens to use, the Cabinet Office has been mapping out administrative challenges that Electoral Registration Officers face when registering service personnel to vote due to their moving life style. We will co-operate with the Electoral Commission, Ministry of Defence and those EROs, who have high numbers of military personnel in their area, to identify best ways of partnering and improving practice. We are also considering communications and cooperation with key partner institutions to raise awareness of electoral registration.

Care Homes

People living in care homes sometimes face various barriers to electoral registration. For example, they may not have the required documentary evidence to confirm identity or they might not be aware of their eligibility to vote. The Cabinet Office will be doing further research with care home managers to better understand these challenges. Research will establish an evidence-base and inform the development of activities targeting care home residents in future.

Student Electoral Registration and the Higher Education and Research Act 2017

Students have always presented a unique challenge with electoral registration and the Government is clear that there needs to be a driver for change to tackle this, making it an area of particular focus during the Every Voice Matters tour. This included hearing directly from electoral administrators, education providers and students about the barriers to voter registration.

The extent to which students are under-represented on the electoral register still remains unclear as they may be registering and voting at their home address. According to YouthSight²⁹ more students chose to vote in their home constituency rather than their place of study. More recent research³⁰ suggested that most students entitled to vote are registered to vote (93%), and only 5% are certain they are not registered.

Following recent government engagement with key stakeholders, a number of barriers to registration for this student group have been identified and the Cabinet Office is committed to working with the sector to understand these and to help promote good

29 YouthSight (February 2015)

30 YouthSight and Higher Education Policy Institute (July 2017)

practice to address the challenges faced by both providers and Local Authorities.

Barriers highlighted have included accessibility in reaching students in halls of residence, current public misconceptions that young people cannot register until they turn 18 and issues on providing appropriate identification to register.

The Cabinet Office is continuing to work with the Electoral Commission, local authorities, universities, colleges and other organisations to ensure citizens have every chance to be registered.

This includes the implementation of student electoral registration provision, following the enactment of the Higher Education and Research Act (HERA) 2017, which is currently in its implementation phase. The Ministerial Guidance to the Office for Students (OfS) will inform and remind Higher Education providers of EROs' existing powers to make requests for information under Regulation 23 of the Representation of the People (England and Wales) Regulations 2001. This comes as the result of evidence gathered by a recent evaluation of the sector by the Cabinet Office, which suggests there is a gap in understanding of current provisions on registration, meaning that many organisations/institutions – including Higher Education providers – are not aware of their legal duty to comply with EROs' requests for data they believe is required for complete and accurate registers.

Lastly, we have an objective of ensuring that Higher Education providers work in partnership with their local ERO to actively promote electoral registration amongst their student populations. However, while we recognise that Higher Education providers should be doing more to help register their student populations, we support that each provider, and their local ERO, should have the freedom to decide what works best for them locally.

The Department for Education-led consultation on the student electoral registration condition, as contained within HERA, has been live since October and interested parties have until December 2017 to provide a response.

Disabled Electors

Members of the Cabinet Office chaired Accessibility of Elections Group, which includes charities such as the Royal Mencap Society, have deep insight into the specific groups with which they work. This includes potential electors with physical, sensory and learning disabilities. Their research sheds light on how disabled voters experience the democratic system:

- Only 31% of people with a learning disability reported that they voted in the 2001 in comparison to 59.4% of the general population had actually voted.

- A study featuring 1600 people with a learning disability across Cambridgeshire found that over 80% had not voted in the 2005 General Election in comparison to 39% of the general population.
- A survey conducted by Mencap in 2014 found that 70% of people with a learning disability say they intended to vote in the 2015 general election.
- However, 60% said they found the process of registering to vote too difficult and 17% said they had been turned away from a polling station.
- Soon to be published research of over 1000 people with a learning disability in Bradford - found that while 86% were registered to vote only 26% cast their vote in the 2015 General Election.³¹
- People with a physical disability are more likely to be registered (90.3%). It is possible that one of the reasons for the high level of completeness is that people with physical disability are less likely to move home than the general population.

People with Learning Disabilities

Voters who are physically disabled are slightly more likely than average to be registered to vote, despite specific barriers that make the experience more difficult for some. A number of factors which may adversely impact registration rates for others may also be relevant to this group, such as confusion about the stages of the canvass, lack of formal political education and preoccupation with other priorities.

The Government has previously worked in partnership with Mencap to fund their Easy Read Guide to registration and voting, as well as an adapted version of the Rock Enroll! Toolkit. They have also trained ambassadors to assist with delivery, a consequence of their belief that more support is required to enable people with learning disabilities to take part in the democratic process.

Disability Access Improvements

The Government is committed to making the electoral system more accessible for all electors including for people with disabilities, and to support this aim at 5 September meeting of the All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Learning Disability the Minister launched a Call for Evidence to:

- Enhance the Government's understanding of the experiences of disabled people in registering to vote and casting their vote.

31 [Tizard Disability Review, Volume 22, 2017](#)

- Help identify if current mechanisms to support disabled people to participate in the democratic process are sufficient; and
- Identify examples of good practice provided by Electoral Service Teams to disabled people at elections.

Stakeholders are being asked to share the Call for Evidence on their channels. This includes other government departments, their networks and arms-length bodies, and the NHS.

Following the 14 November Call for Evidence close the main finding will be analysed in partnership with the Cabinet Office chaired Accessibility of Elections Working Group (including Mind, Mencap, RNIB, Scope, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission) with a report of recommendations to improve the experience of disabled voters at future elections published in Spring 2018.

This builds on recent and current work that has been identified as part of the Minister's engagement through his Every Voice Matters tour, notably:

- The Minister writing to the Department of Health securing agreement for the Certificate of Visual Impairment register (comprising blind and partially sighted people) to be used by local authorities to provide support to sight impaired people at elections, once consent has been provided.
- An accessibility audit of the register to vote website which has identified improvements to support screen reader software as used by blind people, and will consider adding the facility to request materials are provided in accessible formats.

Further work will be progressed to improve the voting experience of disabled people. For example, the Accessibility Elections Working Group is considering how technology can be used to support disabled people to vote within current legislative parameters.

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The Government is committed to introducing votes for life, scrapping the rule that bars British citizens who have lived abroad for more than 15 years from voting.

To support this aim, in October 2016 the Government published a Policy Statement (A democracy that works for everyone: British citizens overseas) which set out the details of the Government's plans to implement this manifesto commitment.

As well as removing a time limit on the right to vote for UK citizens living abroad, the Government also intends to enfranchise any British citizen overseas who was previously resident or registered to vote in the UK. At present, only those British citizens who

were registered to vote before leaving the UK may apply to become overseas electors. Combined, these changes will mean that a further 3 million UK citizens overseas will be enfranchised.

Overseas electors are able to vote in UK Parliamentary elections and register in the last constituency they lived in before leaving the UK.

The Policy Statement attracted a wide range of responses from the electoral community, most notably from the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators. We will publish our response to this feedback early next year.

The Government plans to have implemented the above proposals before the next scheduled parliamentary General Election in 2022. The Government's position is clear: participation in our democracy is a fundamental part of being British, no matter how far you have travelled from the UK.

The introduction of online electoral registration in 2014 has already made it much easier for overseas electors to register to vote – and they have done so in ever increasing numbers. The latest figures available, from December 2016, show there are almost 265,000 registered overseas voters. This is the highest ever total. Indeed, before 2015 the number had never risen above 35,000. The Government will continue to look at reforms that make registering to vote as straightforward as possible.

Ahead of each general election the Electoral Commission runs a campaign to remind people to ensure they are properly registered to vote. Its campaign overseas is supported by UK embassies and consulates in all countries with large populations of UK citizens.



The Minister for the Constitution meets Harry Shindler MBE, a British veteran of the Second World War and campaigner for overseas voting rights

Part Three

Every Voice Matters Tour: Engagement and Findings

Chapter Eight: Ministerial Visits Programme

(i) Every Voice Matters Tour

The Minister for the Constitution's 'Every Voice Matters' tour has visited every region and nation of Great Britain to learn about the barriers that prevent some groups from participating in the democratic system. People from Black and Minority Ethnic groups, those who move house frequently, young people, and those with a longstanding mental health condition or disability are still less likely to register to vote.

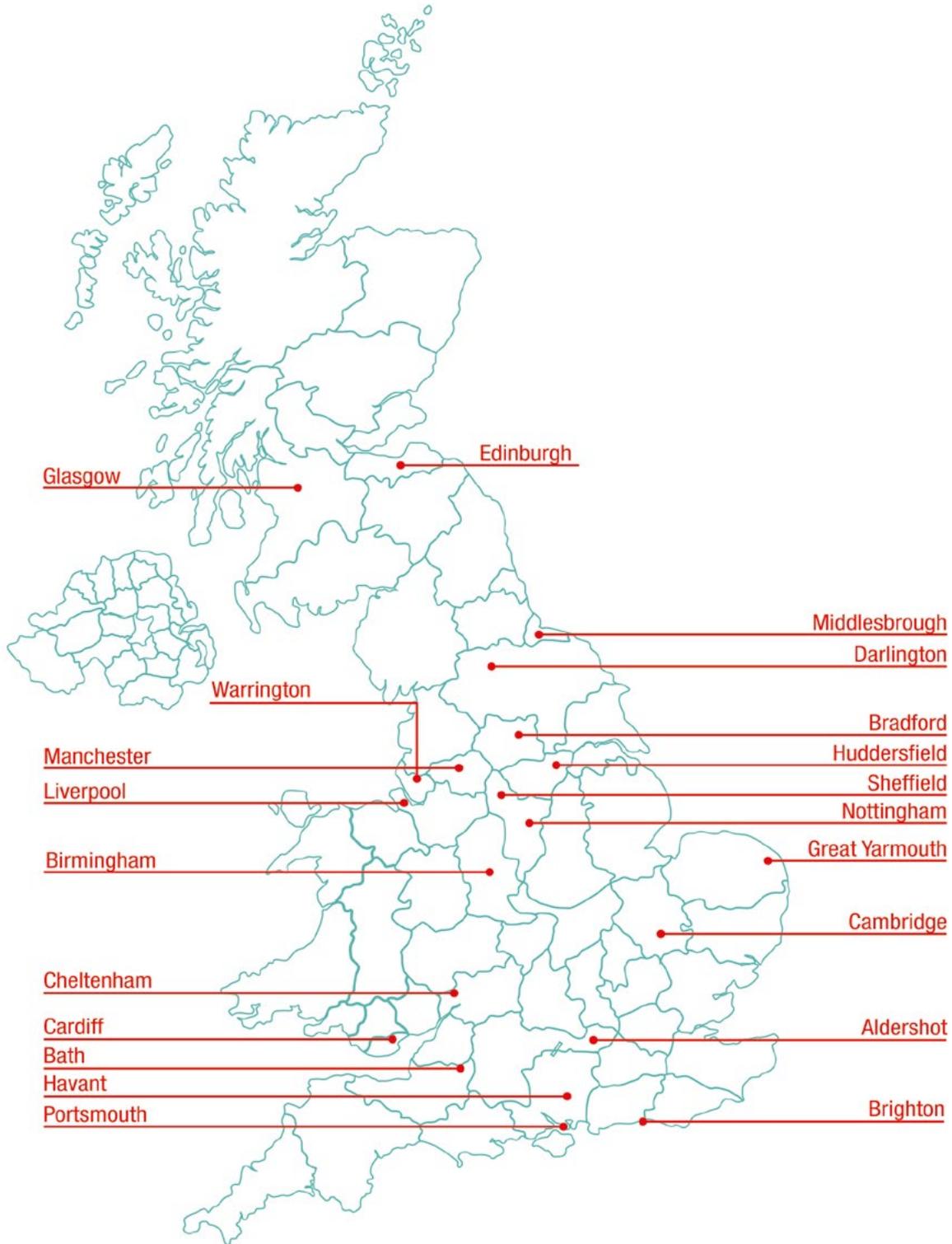
Between September 2016 and May 2017 the Minister spoke with more than 150 individual electors and representatives from organisations, including civil society groups, universities, EROs and Electoral Services Managers, who share the belief that every voice matters. Their insight is integral to further improving the registration process and reaching under registered groups. Government will depend upon the expertise of local authorities and the wider electoral community to implement sustainable changes.

(ii) Local Government Partners

The extra value and insight that electoral administrators were able to provide at ground level helped to form the backbone of the Minister's visits. Region wide roundtables with Electoral Service Managers were hosted across the North West, East Midlands and London. Local authorities in other areas helped to organise, advise and participate in a range of events, assisting discussions with administrators' detailed understanding of the electoral registration system.

Electoral Registration Officers have a vital role to play in maintaining the integrity, breadth, and efficiency of the electoral system. The ability to participate in our democracy depends upon the completeness and accuracy of the electoral register. This is of the utmost importance, and the Government will continue to work closely with the electoral community to maintain and extend the improvements we have already made together.

Figure 5: Every Voice Matters Tour: visits and roundtables across Great Britain



(iii) Partners in Scotland and Wales

Visits to Scotland and Wales featured prominently in the Minister's schedule. In Edinburgh the Minister heard about the challenges facing homeless people to engage in the democratic process with a visit to Shelter Scotland, in addition to gathering the thoughts of Scottish Women's Aid on how anonymous registration could assist domestic abuse survivors.

This was further contextualised in Glasgow where he heard from the facilitators of the Grampian project designed to streamline the canvass process which is already bearing fruit. He also heard directly from a range of Ethnic Minority organisations about the barriers BAME communities in Scotland face.

In Wales, The Minister heard about Cardiff University's innovative approach to making student registration more effective by introducing changes to their processes. He also met a number of Youth Members of Parliament (YMPs) and Willow High School Students to find out more about their work in the 2016 Make Your Mark Ballot, which decides the topics that should be debated at the annual parliament sitting between YMPs.

Throughout, our efforts aimed at boosting democratic participation have been supported by colleagues right across the UK Government.

(iv) Engagement Partners

Government has a track record of engaging with non-government organisations that bring a fresh perspective to engaging potential voters. As noted in chapter four civil society organisations, charities, commercial operations and other independent services often have strong relationships with members and users; specialise in specific activities or have valuable understanding of the intersection between specific target groups and their environment or location.

The visits programme was an opportunity to utilise their expertise on a wide scale, facilitating multiple interactions between the Minister and those working to promote engagement and maximising registration. For example, the British Chinese Project brought together leaders of the Chinese Community in Nottingham to discuss the barriers specific to them; the Royal National Institute of the Blind (RNIB) highlighted the approach that they have been taking to support care home residents in Brighton to register; and Urban Splash hosted a discussion between local housing providers at the newly regenerated Park Hill Estate in Sheffield.

Collectively the civil society and commercial sectors have a vital role to play. Government recognises the know-how and connections they have which help deliver activities and information to particular communities or audiences. We also acknowledge the innovation and insight they can offer and commit to working with a range of organisations to meet our objective of a democracy that works for everyone.

Although the tour has officially concluded, Ministerial visits, meetings and roundtables continue on a regular basis. For example, in October 2017 the Minister for the

Constitution visited Priestley College in Warrington, recipients of a Discovering Democracy Award in 2016 for embedding a democratic culture within their school. He also met with students and staff from Sir Thomas Boteler Church of England High School and Great Sankey Primary School to discuss how they have promoted a democratic culture and encouraged voter registration within the college.

Chapter Nine: Tour Snapshots

(i) Visits Programme

The Minister's programme of visits around the United Kingdom encompassed Wales, Scotland and eight English regions. He met people from each one of the main under registered groups in a total of 22 separate locations. These meetings were intentionally diverse and aimed to surface a range of perspectives. Nevertheless a number of universal themes emerged during discussions, including a generally positive attitude towards democracy and desire for it to work well; embrace of new communications channels, in particular the digital, personalised and visual; and widespread agreement that political education should start young and be sustained until the voting age.

(ii) Tour Snapshots

The following pen pictures tell some of the stories from the Minister's tour. They are snapshots of individual experiences, highlighting a few of the many voices that came to the fore in discussions. They are drawn from a range of demographic groups and geographic locations, offering an illustration of some of the barriers and solutions that different people have highlighted. These conversations do not seek to replace robust evidence, but to illuminate it by personalising the facts and figures set out in Part One of this strategy. Many of the reports have similar themes, including a desire for better integration of messages about democracy tied to different life stages and points of contact.

Every Voice Matters: Shelley College, Huddersfield

When the Minister for the Constitution, visited Shelley College in Huddersfield he met a future leader with an inspirational approach to engaging young people.

Shelley College is a secondary school and Sixth Form College near Huddersfield, West Yorkshire which offers an inspirational learning environment for students aged 13 to 18. Student voice is taken seriously at Shelley College. For example, Jacob Stelling, a year 10 pupil, has been working with members of the Kirklees Youth Council to develop a model that encourages their peers to learn about and participate in democracy.

"Teenagers of today are the voters of tomorrow. I wanted to do something to make it easier for everyone to understand who is who, how they can get involved, but I suppose

my primary aim was merely just for them to understand the importance of a single vote; the difference between a well-informed choice and a misinformed choice.”

As Jacob and his fellow students are aware, politics is not something that is of interest to many of his friends. However, that doesn't mean that they aren't engaged, he argues, just that traditional politics often feels remote and not relevant to young people. He explains, 'when I became a member of Kirklees Youth Council I saw straight away that there were lots of people from schools and colleges in the area that care about different issues'. He quickly realised that the 32 members of Kirklees Youth Council represented thousands of their fellow pupils. It helped Jacob make the connection between Kirklees Youth Council and how democracy works in practical terms. He notes 'having a forum to make our voices heard meant a lot to us.' With this in mind, he came up with a proposition.

“I suggested that we produce a democracy training session and deliver it ourselves. That way we could design it in a way that we thought would get people our own age interested. I knew that if it was delivered by fellow young people, straight away we would be eliminating one of the most prominent misconceptions about politics: we can't vote – it doesn't matter.

Electoral Commission figures suggest that 16-18 year olds - the youngest eligible group - are the least likely to be registered to vote. Members of Kirklees Youth Council agreed that building democratic knowledge through education and deliberation was part of the solution to this problem. Working together, the Youth Councillors designed a democratic education programme to be delivered in schools, colleges, and youth community groups to explain why democracy and how it can work for young people.

This gave Jacob confidence and found himself standing in front of a group of 14 and 15 year olds at Shelley College. Using a slide pack and materials produced by the Democracy Team within Kirklees Youth Council, of which he is the coordinator, he started with an important question to get his peers to engage with: what is democracy? Between them the class volunteered some of the essential elements - representation, equal say, elections, making decisions, changing things. But what about the nuts and bolts? The discussion on local and national democracy was revealing.

“Starting with what happens locally makes sense. People don't understand why young people aren't interested in the running of the country. That's because for the most part, they feel disenfranchised; it's nothing to do with them. But, if you start locally, you can spark an interest, because young people can witness first-hand the importance of politics in their communities.”

Identifying local MPs and understanding the structure of the local council may seem an unlikely source of interest to young people. This exercise provoked a lively debate as Jacob compared different roles to those found in a school structure, bringing to life how the system works. By the end of the session, participants had grasped the basics of who

makes decisions in their local area and who they could talk to about issues that were of interest to them. Many parents and members of the local community might have been surprised to hear how aware the young people were about the different party leaders and the policies that are debated in Westminster and the devolved institutions across the UK.

For Dr Andy Mycock, Reader in Politics at the University of Huddersfield, who joined the session along with Michelle Ross, who leads Kirklees Council's Involving Young Citizens Equally (IYCE) team, the programme designed by Kirklees Youth Council reinforces his experience that supporting political literacy from an early age drives democratic engagement and participation. He makes the point young people need understand the pathways to getting their voice heard by learning how democracy works for them.

“The session gets young people talking and helps them understand the power they have. Recognising that their representatives work for them is the start of a political journey.”

Chris Skidmore MP, the UK government's Minister for the Constitution, witnessed the session at Shelley College, answering questions from young people about how his own interest in politics deepened the more directly he engaged with his local community. He noted that having democracy explained by people you can relate to can be instrumental in feeling able to take part:

“The peer-led approach that Jacob has delivered so clearly and persuasively shows that if we give young people the opportunity to be part of our democracy they will take it. This underlines the important role of schools and colleges in helping young people navigate the democratic system and engage with what it has to give.” (Minister)

The last word, however, goes to Jacob, who hopes that pupils across Kirklees and beyond will join in. If more young people get involved with the Youth Council, he believes, that will be a sign that the message is being heard.

“The Ministerial visit definitely gave us a boost. Those who previously thought that young people were irrelevant in politics saw that we are not. One of the primary focal groups for politicians aren't the voters of today, but those of tomorrow. It also showed that what we are saying is true: if you speak up then you can be heard.”

Every Voice Matters: National Star College, Cheltenham

The Minister for the Constitution met with learners from National Star College to how we can make a democracy that works for people with disabilities.

National Star College is a national specialist college which supports young people with disabilities and learning difficulties. There are a number of courses and services available to its learners to offer a comfortable learning environment to fulfil their potential.

“It’s important to learn more about how I can have my say at elections. I want to make sure I am ready to have my say at the ballot box at the next election,” said Zoe Barnes, from National Star.

As we gear towards the General Election 2020 - the Minister for the Constitution has a vision for the elections to be the most ‘accessible ever’. And this was very much on top of the agenda for the several National Star College learners in attendance.

Whilst they valued the opportunities postal vote offers, some of the learners felt that the physical act of going to a polling station was important and an event in itself, in order to feel part of a more diverse and inclusive democracy. They hope in the future more polling stations will be made even more accessible for those with physical disabilities.

Of course it is clear that disabilities should not be treated with a broad brush. The Minister has met numerous organisations, such as United Response, who have outlined some of the issues people with learning disabilities face to fully comprehend the process of registering to vote and voting.

Staff earmarked literacy guides on the democratic process to be made more widely available and written in a manner that its target audience, particularly those with learning disabilities, can understand. Students heard from the Minister about an Easy Read Guide, developed by the Cabinet Office in partnership in Mencap, which is available to download for free online, which outlines the voting options available to citizens and the importance of registering to vote.

Research carried out by The Office for Disability Issues indicates there are over 11 million people with disabilities in Great Britain³²- demonstrating how diverse and unique the challenge to encourage more participation among disabled people is. That’s why it was fitting that some students indicated the need for more role models with disabilities in the political spectrum.

Josh Reeves, a former National Star College student and who featured in the BBC Three documentary series - The Unbreakables, felt that whilst Electoral Commission research shows that people with disabilities are more likely registered to vote than those without, it is important that disabled citizens are empowered to work in government and politics. He

32 [Disability in the United Kingdom 2016 Facts and Figures](#)

felt that this would generate even further interest from disabled groups who are keen to engage in the democratic process.

“I really enjoyed having the opportunity to talk to the Minister about how we can make people relate to politics. When you have disabilities you have to fight for all your choices in everything from where you go to college to where you live. Things which able-bodied people take for granted, such as going to a polling station, can be a challenge for a person with disabilities,” said Josh.

The Minister was pleased to hear about his enthusiasm on the topic and reminded students of the career opportunities available in the civil service in particular to people from diverse backgrounds. The Minister heard a range of thoughtful and personal experiences and thanked students for taking the time out of their school schedule to tell him their stories.

“I would like to personally thank all the students who shared their personal challenges to engage in the democratic process. No one should be denied their right to vote and it’s The Government’s job to ensure we’ve suitably equipped our citizens to have their say”. (The Minister)

Every Voice Matters: Long Road Sixth Form College, East of England

Although age is the most significant indicator of whether or not someone is on the electoral roll, intersection with a number of other factors can increase the risk of under registration. Some under registered groups, such as frequent movers and people from BME backgrounds, may also have a high proportion of young people. Against this backdrop the Minister visited Long Road College in Cambridge to find out how sixth form students felt we could encourage voter registration among their peers.

Electoral Commission research confirms that people aged 18-24 are more likely to experience multiple barriers that prevent them from registering to vote or vote itself.³³ For example young people are more likely to move frequently from one address to another, making them more susceptible to falling off the register as they change address.

However, separate research also indicates that there is now an emerging interest among young people in politics and having their say at the ballot box. According to Hansard Society Audit into Political Engagement (2016) there was an increase of 16% from 2015 among young people about whether they are certain to vote in the next election.³⁴

With the Electoral Register peaking at a new high after the EU Referendum with over 46.5 million people in the country registered to vote, it is important that this interest is

33 [The Electoral Commission “Voter engagement and young people” researched and published July 2002](#)

34 [Audit of Political Engagement 13, The 2016 report, published by Hansard Society 2016](#)

sustained. That's why this tour gave a voice to young people's fresh ideas and sought new perspectives on what might help increase voter registration. As Chris Skidmore MP found there were suggestions aplenty from the sixth form politics students at Long Road College.

“People my age care about lots of issues but don't know what to do about it. We need to help young people take part, not leave them out.”

This visit was particularly timely as Cambridgeshire and Peterborough prepared to embark on an exciting chapter in their history, hosting a mayoral election for the first time. Getting young people from the local area equipped to have their say was top of the agenda. The discussion, hosted by David Evans, Head of Politics, featured presentations by students on ideas they had to raise awareness of the individual responsibility people aged 16 and over have to register to vote.

“I hadn't thought about registering to vote before. This helped me realise why it's important and how easy it is to do.”

A thoughtful and detailed presentation delivered by Daniel Colthart and Torrin Wilkins highlighted policies directly relevant to young people that are at stake in the upcoming mayoral election, including local transport.

Local transport is considered to be a key issue for students in these areas as many are travelling in from rural areas, thus encountering difficulties to attend college punctually. The students felt if voter registration was promoted through this lense, this would make young people understand the importance of registering to vote in order to have their say at the polls.

“Young people need to understand why it is important that they vote in elections. If this is explained to them by someone of a similar age it would really have a positive impact. ” (Student)

Making politics relatable to young people was an underlying theme connecting the different ideas presented. Connie Kimpton, Princess Tamou and Saffron Hope stressed the importance of peers talking with them about politics rather than people who are significantly older, believing that this would go a long way towards addressing perceived disengagement amongst young people.

Visible representation of young role models in the political sphere was also considered to be an important step towards engaging a younger generation. Students felt that raising awareness of the Youth MPs or 18-30 year olds who are MPs, whether through social or traditional media, would encourage their friends and family to be more confident that their voices are being represented in parliament.

Organisations such as Bite the Ballot and British Youth Council were praised for their role in promoting voter registration among young people. It is a testament to these

organisations that the young students at Long Road College, effectively their target audience, are aware of their work. The Minister was impressed by the young audience's enthusiasm for discussing politics and thanked them for taking the time to think about what could inspire them and their friends to engage in the democratic process.

“It was great to meet such enthusiastic and well informed students who are committed to ensuring that their voice is heard loud and clear at the ballot box. To truly have a democracy that works for everyone, it is essential we have youth participation.” (Minister)

Every Voice Matters: The British Chinese Community

One of the best established ethnic minority in the UK is one of the most under registered groups. But that's set to change with the emergence of new champions for democratic engagement.

Whilst it is sometimes assumed that people from Black and Minority Ethnic (BME) backgrounds are less likely to be registered to vote, there are very significant variations between different groups. For example, registration rates for Black Caribbean (82%) and Asian Indian groups (83%) broadly mirror the overall completeness rate for the electoral register of 85%. The British Chinese Project is working to raise registration rates amongst those with Chinese backgrounds from the current level of 70% to the 85% average.

The City of Nottingham in the East Midlands is home to a rapidly growing British Chinese population which in itself has become increasingly diverse. Older residents with backgrounds in Hong Kong, Singapore and Malaysia have been joined by more recent arrivals from the Chinese mainland, adding to a rich mix of cultures and languages. When the Minister for the Constitution met with British Chinese people from the city he heard a story of civic engagement, hard working businesses and a passion for education, and how these values hold the key to opening up democratic participation.

“The British Chinese community is in transition. We face new challenges and people are want positive change. Connecting with the political process is a way of shaping the future”

Anthony Cheung has seen this development first hand. His own interest in politics took root from a young age, but he was aware that others were not so engaged. This was partly due, he notes, to the cultural backgrounds of those settling in Britain in the 1960s and 1970s. “Democratic rights were not always respected in their countries of origin”, he explains, ‘and there wasn't a tradition of casting a vote. Elections weren't the top priority for those establishing themselves in a new country”.

What was deeply embedded was a respect for education and economic productivity, which helped those from Chinese backgrounds put down roots and share core values.

But more than half a century on and a new generation is starting to reach out through the political process to have their say on these issues.

“Before the last General Election the British Chinese Project toured the country by bus, stopping at major cities to talk to members of the community about why it was important to register to vote. Over one thousand signed up, many more than we had ever hoped to reach”

Councillor Alex Yip, Vice Chair of the British Chinese Project and Birmingham City Councillor, sees this as part of a trend towards a desire for greater representation from within a well-integrated and vibrant population. There are barriers that remain but these are being tackled from within. For example, understanding written guidance remains a difficulty for some elderly Chinese who may speak several languages fluently but have literacy problems.

A younger, more politically aware generation is sharing knowledge with their elders and educating them about the democratic system. This means that for every Chinese young person who is engaged there is a new opportunity to influence older people who would otherwise have been excluded. The EU Referendum in June 2016 gave a big push to debate within the community and got different generations talking. The Chinese press and community centres played their part, but family conversations were particularly influential:

“British born Chinese took a deep interest in the referendum because they could see its importance. They taught their grandparents why it was relevant and got them engaged.”

So what next for democracy within the Chinese community - will interest continue to flourish? The British Chinese Project can make sure it does, believes Alex Yip. He would like to see stronger partnerships between different organisations to help drive engagement further. Heralding the work of Operation Black Vote in developing political participation amongst those with Black backgrounds, Alex says that a similar initiative is needed for those from Chinese backgrounds, having been impressed by levels of representation at the Minister's recent roundtable discussion on BAME engagement.

“We need to encourage people to feel part of community so they feel connected and want to participate in elections. I would like to see a forum that brings together Chinese groups, organisations and projects, underpinned with the aim of greater democratic participation”

In Nottingham those members of the community who greeted the Minister had further observations on the upcoming challenges, as well as ideas for how to get more involved. For example, new immigration from the Chinese mainland means that many have no experience of democracy at all. This suggests that innovative methods are required to encourage those who stay in the longer term to play a role in the political process. Although those who arrive as students cannot register to vote, Dr Bin Yu from the

University of Nottingham believes educational institutions have a vital role to play in democratic engagement:

“As the community develops we have more higher skilled workers than there used to be. They were students, or have connections to the university, and can be catalysts for change.”

If the trend is to continue, argues Anthony, the Chinese community must celebrate and make visible its own role models as well as working with other minority groups.

“We want to smash the bamboo ceiling. The first MP of Chinese origin was elected in 2015 and I hope there will be many more role models to come.”

Every Voice Matters: Birmingham Council, West Midlands

The Canvass is one of the biggest - and most resource intensive - events in electoral administration. But how is it adapting to the changing lives of 21st century communities? On his first stop in his Every Voice Matters tour, the Minister met Electoral Services staff at Birmingham City Council to hear more about the successes and challenges of developing a sustainable approach for the future.

Electoral Registration Officers and electoral administrators are at the coalface with responsibility for the administration of electoral registration and the conduct of elections in their local authority area. They offer a unique, grassroots-level perspective of the challenges that some citizens face to engage in the democratic process.

That is why Chris Skidmore’s first stop on his tour of the nations and regions of the United Kingdom was Birmingham: the largest local authority in England has a wealth of insight into barriers to democratic participation. It is also at the forefront of driving improvements to the system of electoral registration. During the summer and autumn of 2016, along with South Lakeland and Ryedale, Birmingham piloted whether there are more sustainable and efficient ways of canvassing compared with the current process.

Further pilots are being planned for 2017 with Birmingham, South Lakeland and Ryedale all taking part. This piloting is aimed at laying the groundwork for reforming the annual canvass framework so that all EROs, across Great Britain, will benefit from greater discretion to canvass in more cost effective ways, reducing canvassing costs by over £20 million annually across Great Britain.

Birmingham is a symbolic example of Britain’s diverse, modern and vibrant cities. With a growing population of over 1 million and estimated 35% of its population deriving from Asian or Afro-Caribbean communities, hearing directly from electoral services was important to understand how they are adapting to the needs and lifestyle of its citizens.

“As part of my tour, I have met a number of local authorities and each time I was interested to hear the unique issues they respectively encountered. Meeting the Electoral Services team at Birmingham was an important starting point to help shape my understanding in this area.” (Minister)

The Minister had an in depth discussion with Rob Connelly, Head of Electoral Services at Birmingham, to hear how their 2016 canvass pilot had been progressing. While findings were still emerging, even at that early stage, it was clear that the pilot was proving successful in streamlining the canvass process. Rob explained how the pilot was helping to reduce administrative pressures and reduce costs significantly while ensuring a more user friendly approach for both citizens and administrators. .

Only a few months later the Minister delivered a keynote speech at the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) Conference announcing that the pilot activity carried out in Birmingham had reduced canvassing costs by over £100k. This is a significant sum for a single authority. Importantly, Birmingham felt the quality of the information gathered during the canvass was still high quality.

Whilst it was important to reflect on the great work carried out by Birmingham to secure such great savings, it was equally imperative to hear about the challenges that still exist and may be common for electoral administrators across the country. Rob Connelly and the Minister were in unison in the notion that any messaging on electoral registration should retain the core underlying principle of the individual responsibility to register vote and conscious efforts should be made to adhere to that.

“It was great to be able to go through in detail with the Minister about how positively the pilot had been performing. The work does not stop. We need to continue to seek ways to make voter registration more accessible to our citizens.” (Rob Connelly)

Finally, the Minister heard about what would be a common issue raised by local authorities across the country during the Every Voice Matters Tour - duplicate applications to register to vote. Rob and his team were keen to explore options on how to sufficiently tackle duplicate registrations with the Minister.

They discussed some of the anecdotal evidence, from the electoral community and other stakeholders, on the causes of duplicate registrations. For instance, there was discussion on instances where citizens have seemingly not realised they are already registered and completed a full application when none of their details have changed. They also talked about some other variations, such as citizens who are already registered completing a full application to change one or two details, such as their voting preference or open register status.

Every Voice Matters: Blind Veterans UK Care Home, Brighton

Disabled electors and care home residents each face different barriers to registration and participation in the democratic process. But as Chris Skidmore heard during his visit to Blind Veterans UK, when these issues are experienced together, extra consideration is required in order to ensure that those people can continue to have their say at the ballot box.

Blind Veterans UK provide veterans support to adjust to sight loss, overcome the challenges of blindness and enjoy daily life. The charity has been offering physical and emotional support to vision-impaired veterans since 1915. The Brighton Centre facilities include an IT suite, art and craft workshop, gym, swimming pool and other sports and recreation facilities. Their accommodation is primarily used for short-term visitors, however, some are permanent homes for people who need the support, comfort and security of a nursing and residential care home.

Sharman Collins, the centre social worker, believes that collaboration with a range of partners is essential to the well being of the 32 permanent residents, which is why a strong relationship with the local authority is a priority. This includes support with registration and voting: the majority of residents have chosen a postal vote, although two prefer to attend the polling station in person. This is facilitated by local authority electoral services teams, who are able to assist people with disabilities to vote confidentially with the use of appropriate devices.

“Without the support of polling station staff, voting in person would be impossible for our residents. With the help of the pakflatt device, visually impaired electors can participate in the way that they want. It’s vital that choice exists - for many a postal vote is ideal, but others value their direct interaction with the ballot box. At the centre we are aware that these options exist and are able to support individuals”

Lauren Pridmore, the Member Experience Coordinator, highlighted how important voting is to many of the residents. Many ask family members to help them, but others depend on staff at the centre to assist. This includes people with dementia, many of whom wanted to have their say on the EU referendum. Whilst it is sometimes assumed that people with the condition can’t and won’t vote, even by other family members, many are still capable and keen. As in other areas of their lives, the emphasis is on helping residents exercise their independence. For example, the centre’s use of a voice activated echo dot in every room may have potential to provide the right information on registration and voting.

“Voting is really important, including to the people who live here. That’s why we encourage candidates from different political parties into to the centre to speak to the residents and day users about the candidates’ views on different issues. At the

centre we watched the televised debates ahead of the EU referendum and had a discussion afterwards.”

Sharman added that local politicians should be reminded to visit care homes in their areas as access to politicians is key.

The Minister asked whether there was potential to work with other partners to spread good practice. David Hennessey from Brighton and Hove Council noted how practice varies across the sector and encouraging the rest to meet the standards of the best would widen access to democracy amongst this group.

Lauren added that people living in care homes can often become ‘de-citizenised’ with the loss of key documents such as driving licences. However she added that at the Blind Veterans care home in Brighton there was a concerted effort to avoid detachment from wider society:

“Residents are around people who are in the position to give them help and advice. Voting is their right and we are here to make sure they can use it”.

Every Voice Matters: Keogh Barracks, South of England

The Armed Forces are a unique group in the electoral registration landscape and registration challenges presented by high levels of mobility have been met with a determined and effective response from the MOD and Armed Forces.

Earlier this year, Keogh Barracks in Aldershot kindly welcomed the Minister for Democratic Engagement, Chris Skidmore, to hear more about efforts to ensure that members of the Armed Forces are registered to vote.

The Armed Forces are stationed across the world, protecting the United Kingdom’s interests, citizens and dependents. With an estimated 160,000 Service personnel in the United Kingdom, it is important that they have every opportunity to exercise their democratic right.

Great efforts have been made in this area over the years, making it easier than ever for serving personnel to vote. The relationship between the Electoral Commission and the Ministry of Defence has been crucial in providing advice and support to members of the Armed Forces, particularly those positioned outside their constituency during the polls.

Working together to produce cross-platform campaigns, this relationship has ensured that our serving personnel obtain the best information to allow them to vote.

On the day of the visit, Lieutenant Colonel Helen Winder and Major Matthew Nowak greeted Chris Skidmore, introducing him to a number of their colleagues. They were also joined by Andrew Colver, Electoral Service Manager at Rushmoor, who has extensive

experience of the process of getting more Armed Forces on the electoral register and the complexities at hand in doing this.

During the visit the Minister spent time with Army medics, sharing opinions and experiences. At a time when many of our Armed Forces are stationed abroad, gathering insight from this unique group is crucial in creating effective, targeted campaigns.

Of the visit, Chris Skidmore said:

“It was a real honour to meet members of the Armed Forces at the Keogh Barracks. Their work is like no other and incredibly challenging. I was pleased to hear about how committed they are to ensuring all new arrivals are registered to vote.”

After hearing from Colonel Winder on how the field hospitals operate, the Keogh Barracks' Unit Registration Officer gave a presentation illustrating how they ensure their personnel are registered to vote, making use of social media channels for a wider reach.

Andrew Colver then delivered an insightful presentation detailing some of the challenges that are being addressed. Our serving personnel can change their home location periodically, and they sometimes conduct temporary overseas commitments in addition, which means provision must be in place for them to enact their democratic right unhindered.

Andrew touched upon the methods of engagement with members of the Armed Forces, which he considers vital; face-to-face engagement with the soldiers in the Garrison has proved to be the most effective method, and his team achieves the most success at induction and deployment events.

Recent registration events have further boosted an already positive picture at the barracks in Rushmoor, increasing significantly the numbers now registered to vote. Andrew believes in order for registration levels and awareness of the democratic process to remain high, the relationship between the Unit Registration Officer and the Electoral Services Team needs to be as strong and as consistent as possible.

Chapter Nine: Roundtable Discussions

(i) A voice for under registered and vulnerable groups

In parallel with the Minister's visits across Great Britain he hosted a series of roundtables with representatives of under registered and vulnerable groups. These discussions brought together dozens of organisations with expertise on working with communities and interest groups that the government wants to engage in the democratic process.

(ii) Process, Access and Engagement Barriers

Discussions on the barriers faced by different groups were productive. For example, Bite the Ballot and the British Youth Council shared their insight on working with young people and highlighted how their activities can help overcome barriers to greater involvement and enhance engagement. Women's Aid, Imkaan and Survive offered very specific feedback on the processes that deter survivors of domestic abuse from registering, prompting a policy review to improve the system. Operation Black Vote, Voice4Change England and the British Chinese Project emphasised that not all BME groups face the same issues and that a combination of factors led to relatively low registration rates in some groups. At the disability roundtable participants highlighted the access issues that some disabled people still encounter when registering or exercising their vote. United Response, Mencap and Scope highlighted the importance of the disability access improvement group to giving proper consideration to potential improvements.

(iii) Insights and Observations from Visits and Roundtables

Analysis of the discussions during visits, roundtables and other events such as the Elevation Networks' Great Debate Grand Finale has identified several repeated themes as well as one-off insights that were particularly thought provoking. Participants were thoughtful, measured and generally practical in their suggestions, often revealing key truths about the behaviours and preferences of different groups, ideas for improvement and thoughts on challenges ahead.

Not every idea, however good, can be implemented at any given time. But all of these insights are useful for informing future policy and helping to shape communications. The choices that Government makes will be informed by these conversations as well as the evidence set out elsewhere in this strategy.

(iv) General Themes

Language Barriers

A common theme that emerged from many of the discussions was that there is an issue surrounding the complexity of the language used in the registration process. For example, disabled groups feel that the language used in the forms is confusing and, as such, this is creating a barrier to registration.

Similarly, at the roundtable for London Local Authorities, it was noted that areas with high English Foreign Language populations often have the lowest HEF return rates. Organisations that represent homeless people and victims of domestic abuse also said that the low literacy rates among these groups deter them from completing the registration process.

Peer to Peer Engagement

This method has been commonly recommended by a range of stakeholders as an effective means to encourage democratic participation. In particular this was considered a key approach with young people and attainees, as they are more likely to respond positively to people of similar age and background. For Black and Ethnic Minority communities this method had proven success and the key to it is empowering local individuals and communities to be changemakers.

Shelter Scotland also considered this method to be effective with homeless people. They had seen previous positive results in this area when a trusted advisor, who may have been homeless before, encourages participation in the democratic process, as they related the client group more.

Joined up digital services

As the Government has moved to a digital first approach to delivering key services, it was suggested at several roundtables that citizen interaction with these services should be mapped to identify opportunities to signpost the voter registration message further. For example, young people in particular who access GOV.UK for more information about their National Insurance number or to provide their details for a DVLA application, could potentially be nudged towards the register to vote website.

Collaborative Working

During the youth focused roundtable many of the organisations agreed on the need for greater collaboration between different civil society organisations, particularly for voter registration drives. Suggestions included several organisations working on a single project with each taking responsibility for a different facet: for example one organisation working on digital and another engaging key influencers.

This was further reinforced by members from the British Chinese Project at both the BME roundtable and the visit to East Midlands. The representatives felt introducing a forum which brings together different charities and BME groups would help draw upon expertise and stakeholder reach to engage BME communities on a wider scale. A joint written statement, between the Government, key BME groups and cross party MPs, on the importance of BME participation in the democratic process would also be a welcomed introduction.

ERO Access To Data

Many groups brought up the issue of EROs being unable to access useful data, particularly relating to frequent home movers. Both external organisations and EROs themselves believe they would benefit from being able to use council tax data in order to make the canvass process simpler.

Government has established two scoping projects under the auspices of the Modern Registration Division examining the issue of ERO access to data. One will consider the possibilities for capturing information about frequent movers using external and council data sources and one will explore the role of data in the registration process more widely.

There are also data protection issues within student electoral registration when students live outside the electoral boundary of the university they attend and the challenge of transferring personal data for the purposes of electoral registration which may ensue. Attendees from Landlord Associations referenced the fact that landlords are required to notify water supplier companies when there has been a change in tenancy, which might be able to enable a data sharing opportunity between the water company and electoral services team.

(v) Issues Raised by Different Groups

Accessibility for People with Disabilities

On 29 November the Minister chaired a roundtable discussion on the barriers faced by disabled people in registering to vote and voting and how these can be addressed. Attendees included Mencap, Mind, RNIB, Scope, the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission.

Scope, a charity supporting disabled groups, made reference to research³⁵ that indicates that people with disabilities are anxious at polling stations, with 67% of polling stations having at least one physical barrier. They reported anecdotal feedback which suggested that the registration forms are not in a user friendly format for blind or partially sighted people. It was suggested that more guidance for people in polling stations on how to assist those with disabilities should be developed.

Mencap talked with the Minister about the difficulties their client group face, such as Household Enquiry Forms being hard to understand as well as the actual process of voting. It was suggested that the greater distribution and creation of easy read guides would help to address this issue. Furthermore, Mencap had received feedback that people with learning disabilities preferred postal voting, thus suggesting greater promotion of this option to their audience.

The 29 September roundtable was focused on the promotion of the Call for Evidence³⁶ to support the Government's commitment to ensure the electoral system is accessible for all electors, launched by the Minister at the 5 September All Party Parliamentary Group (APPG) on Learning Disability.

Attendees included those from the 29 November roundtable with additional representation at Chief Executive (senior representative) level and high profile ambassadors. Similar themes

³⁵ [Polls Apart 2010, Opening elections disabled people, Published in July 2010.](#)

³⁶ [Polls Apart 2010, Opening elections disabled people, Published in July 2010.](#)

to the 29 November roundtable were expressed with additional insight provided, including from the RNIB stating the importance of harmonising work into a collective brand similar to Operation Black Vote, which would raise the profile and impact of improving the accessibility of elections for disabled people.

BAME Communities

A common barrier raised by the various discussions the Minister had with BAME organisation was the need for more role models from ethnic minority backgrounds within Parliament. A number of potential solutions were proposed, including work shadowing and mentoring programmes facilitated by Parliament for people from BAME backgrounds. Suggestions were also made to utilise religious festivals or gatherings at places of worship to promote voter registration more widely.

One attendee at a roundtable with BAME organisations in Scotland said he received a newsletter which was aimed specifically at the ethnic minority communities in Scotland. He believed making use of the broadcast and digital/print media aimed at BAME communities could be another way of engaging more interest in the democratic process.

Canvass and December Publication Date

A consistent theme expressed by electors and administrators alike is an issue with the canvass system.

The majority of electors are affected by their local authority's annual canvass: either directly as part of efforts to boost the completeness and accuracy of the register, or indirectly as a consequence of the requirement to do so. During the Every Voice Matters tour, testimony from both administrators and electors highlighted a number of ways in which canvass mechanisms are increasingly at odds with the realities of online registration. For example, reluctance to share personal data on the doorstep; confusion between the Household Enquiry Form and the Invitation to Register; and the expectation that once an online application has been made no further action is required are familiar issues for administrators. The scale and cost of the undertaking has encouraged the electoral community to examine streamlined, more efficient approaches consistent with electoral law.

The distinction between a Household Enquiry Form (HEF) and Invitation to Register (ITR) seems to cause a particular issue, as applicants often presume that by completing the HEF, they are registered and can then ignore the ITR. The low conversion rate between HEF and ITRs (in the 2015 Canvass, 46% of people responded to HEFs, compared to the 29% that responded to ITRs) is frustrating for administrators, who then often have to use further resources making face-to-face contact with the elector.

Many believe that the December publication date for the electoral register is now outdated and unnecessary. Manchester EROs thought the timing of a December register publication was no longer appropriate and taking action like issuing HNLs twice a year (once in the autumn and then in the runup to polls) would be far more effective. However, in other

places, such as in the East Midlands, no clear consensus on when would be better could be reached, and there was some recognition that it might be different across multiple Local Authorities.

Home Movers and Frequent Movers

A common theme from student and frequent home movers groups – first raised by the London Borough of Southwark and reiterated by the London Borough of Lambeth – was a preference for people to remain registered at second address (typically their parents' address). In light of this, these groups would like the ability to remain registered at a second address of their choosing.

In the case of students, for example, there was a clear preference for being registered at their home address as opposed to their university address, with 60% preferring to register at their home address and only 13% preferring to register at their university address (the remaining 27% being made up of students whose university and home constituencies are the same).

Even amongst those who wish to register to vote at their university address student and youth groups have told us that they do not want to lose registration at their home addresses. There might be some confusion in communication here, highlighting the fact that many are often worried about registering in their university constituency for fear of losing their registration at their home constituency.

Frequent home movers had a wider concern with securing access to credit. Having changed address within a short amount of time and being officially resident at each one can often act as a flag to credit referencing agencies. This can then act as a barrier for the resident to be able to easily access credit.

At the Home Movers roundtable one local authority said that in their experience that new tenants at a property with children tend to take a longer time in registering to vote. Also raised at both the Home Movers Roundtable and the London Local Authority roundtable was the make up of flat or home shares, which can result in tenants not speaking to each other, meaning Household Enquiry Forms may not reach them. In addition, anecdotal evidence through Local Authorities suggest that some tenants may be less inclined to opening a letter from them.

Potential suggestions also included changing the timing on the annual canvass to capture more students and also greater collaboration between the housing associations and local authorities to help maximise response.

Survivors of Domestic Abuse

Anonymous registration is intended to protect those whose safety would be at risk if their name and address appeared on the electoral register – such as survivors of domestic abuse, victims of harassment or stalking, or witnesses in certain criminal cases.

As domestic abuse charities and electoral administrators explained at the roundtable events, survivors of domestic abuse can face difficulties with the process of registering to vote anonymously. Some do not have documents that prove their safety would be at risk. Others have no links to the officials who could attest to the risks to their safety. The need to re-register every 12 months is perceived by some as a further barrier.

Those who perceive the scheme to be complex and difficult to access can be deterred from applying to register. In 2016, 2,323 people in the UK were registered to vote anonymously, compared with 9.3 million applications made through the usual channels.

With input from survivors, refuge managers and organisations supporting those who have suffered domestic abuse, the Government is tackling this issue. Following this round table, the Minister for the Constitution visited Scottish Women's Aid in Edinburgh; Amadudu in Liverpool; Aurora New Dawn in Portsmouth; and Manchester Women's Aid and Saheli Asian Women's Project, before announcing new measures at Bristol Women's Aid in September 2017.

Young People's Democratic Awareness

Representatives at both the Youth and BME roundtable with the Minister highlighted the value of understanding from a young age the mechanics of voting and registration. Citizenship is part of the national curriculum and is statutory at Key Stage 3 & 4 and this includes areas such as the democratic process. Teachers are granted freedom to teach the topics they wish for Citizenship, providing an opportunity for registration and voting to be taught across schools in Great Britain.

A significantly lower proportion of the younger population votes compared to older groups (18-24 saw a 43% turnout at the 2015 General Election, compared to 78% in the 65+ category) and one of the contributing factors here is often cited to be a general lack of political awareness built up in early life. One suggestion that was made during a visit to Shelley College in Huddersfield was to encourage MPs, Councillors, and EROs to visit schools more frequently, to discuss the merits of democratic participation.

Homeless Electors

Representatives at the Frequent Movers Roundtable (most notably Shelter, Crisis, and St Mungo's) note that most homeless people are not aware that they can register at temporary accommodation. This can be done through a Declaration of Local Connection Form available online. However, there appears to be some confusion about the purpose of the form, with a misperception that it relates to housing benefits. Many homeless people do not have the resources to print the form in order to start the process.

Another issue is that low levels of literacy among homeless people often prevent them from participating in the democratic process. St Mungo's states that up to 50% of those they work with have literacy skills that are insufficient to complete an application to register. Homeless people may also not have the relevant documentation on hand to register due to personal

reasons, but there are measures in place (attestations process for example) to account for this. Mobile phones are considered to be a potential communication route for homeless people, through texts or voicemails, as St Mungo's believe the majority of homeless people have access to a mobile phone.

Tenants and Residents in Social Housing

Levels of under registration amongst frequent home movers prompted a particular focus on different types of housing and the opportunities to increase engagement with tenants and residents. During his Every Voice Matters tour, the Minister for the Constitution met with housing associations in the Yorkshire area to explore ways to promote voter registration across their properties.

Housing Roundtable, Sheffield Park Hill Estate

Whilst the barriers that have been identified for private renters are not as prevalent for social renters, there remain challenges to overcome on voter registration. In a roundtable discussion with housing organisations from across Yorkshire, the Minister for the Constitution explored the issues faced by tenants and residents and ways in which these might be addressed.

Representatives from housing associations across the region provide services to a range of different people, in varying locations and using a wide range of accommodation. However, as Raymond Kinsella, Regional Manager for Great Places explained, some of the barriers to getting involved in the democratic process are held in common:

“As a sector there’s been a move towards electronic communications, which means less face to face contact with customers and fewer letters. But there are still touchpoints, such as the annual contact with tenants for gas checks, which could provide opportunities to remind people about registering to vote”

In the meantime digital communications offer a high volume, low cost means of promoting these messages - provided people have access to technology and the confidence to engage with it. Although a small minority experience digital exclusion, the vast majority can get online, as Gwen Beer from Places for People explained:

“When you add in self-reported online access, smartphone access or access via a close family member, around 90% of our tenants and residents are digitally literate. People don’t answer their phones and there’s a constant updating of phone numbers which is a challenge. It is moving very rapidly”.

Local tenants associations might also provide a forum for providing information about the democratic process. Peer to peer communication is frequently effective, and there may be positive lessons to be learned from the success of BME democracy champions.

Participants in the discussion suggested a number of ways that other organisations could support, ranging from stalls at parents evening, closer working with utility companies and local groups such as Sheffield Money. The potential for highlighting the relationship between electoral registration and credit scoring emerged as a strong theme, as picked up by Clare Atkinson from Together Housing:

“Credit rating is a way in - for tenants this is really vital. The link between registration and credit score is not well understood, but reduced price credit is important to people’s lives.”

Others highlighted the pride that local residents felt in their communities and that this could be encouraged by positive messages about the numbers who are registered to vote, thus influencing decisions in their local area. Several made the point that it could be a proxy for engagement and well being. The timing of engagement was recognised by participants as significant, with a consensus emerging that the settling in visit for new tenants was optimal for holding conversations covering wider topics than moving in priorities.

Wrapping up the discussion the Minister thanked all those taking part and acknowledged their deep understanding of their customers:

“Your reservoir of insight helps to open up new avenues for engaging tenants and residents. Democratic participation is a key way for people to have a say in their lives, their environment, their local community. I want to find effective ways of sharing that message with as many people as possible, including by encouraging local authorities to work with partner organisations to promote democratic engagement.”

(vi) Summary

The year-long programme of visits, roundtables and bilateral meetings produced rich insight into the experiences behind the statistics. The testimony of representative organisations and the stories of individuals and from many different backgrounds revealed the diversity of people’s interaction with the electoral system and underlined the need for tailored solutions for particular groups or circumstances. However, the conversations also highlighted common areas which were important, many of which are familiar in the context of public service improvement: good communication, joined up experiences and ease of access. The ‘citizen first’ design principle that users have come to expect is examined further in Part Four, which considers future plans for the electoral system.

Part Four: Championing Our Democratic Society

Chapter Ten: Expanding Participation

The Government is committed to modernising the systems and practices that underpin our democracy. Part One has set out the evidence for greater engagement and Part Two outlined the approach that we are taking to driving improvement. We have made the case that a healthy, participative democracy needs an infrastructure that works to meet the needs of electors. Ensuring straightforward and speedy customer journeys and a seamless experience for electors is essential to minimising friction and encouraging interaction. The foundations of electoral registration must be strong in order to give citizens confidence in a clear and secure democracy.

However, efficient, citizen focused services - though vital - are not in themselves sufficient to renew and promote a democratic society, a point made by contributors to Part Three. The majority of registered electors participate in UK Parliamentary General Elections,³⁷ with high numbers of applications and increased turnout in June 2017. Others are more deeply engaged, either formally as councillors, campaigners and citizens active in their local communities, or informally, for example through online activism. However, a minority are less involved with either the institutions or practices of our democracy, many of whom remain unregistered or choose not to vote.

It is important to continually refresh our democracy and attempt to reach all citizens, whether they are fully immersed in its stream or an observer at the edge, so that they can play their part. That is why the Government is developing an inclusive, nationwide programme aimed at encouraging everyone - including young people who are the future of our society - to understand the history and importance of system of government and what this means for them personally and collectively.

This festival of democracy will begin in 2018 with the Suffrage Centenary Programme, marking the 100th anniversary of the Representation of the People Act (1918). This is an ideal moment to foster greater awareness of the fight for an equal franchise and the significance of this democratic milestone. The strands of celebration, education and participation will offer something for people of all levels of interest, knowledge and involvement. It is a landmark opportunity to examine and discuss our democracy and reinvigorate our society's relationship with the franchise.

To maintain this momentum the Government will institute a National Democracy Week, to coincide with the centenary of the Act. This will build on the success of previous initiatives,

37 [House of Commons 2017, full results and analysis, second edition.](#)

such as Bite the Ballot's National Voter Registration Day, and act as an annual focal point for promoting democratic engagement as widely as possible.

Many of our partners have told us a focused week of activity is needed to help amplify their messages and build on the momentum of democratic participation in our most recent electoral events. We will work strategically with our partners to deliver this shared objective, with messages designed to reach and influence under-registered groups.

These activities cannot be delivered by Government alone, but require the knowledge, expertise and passion of groups and individuals with an interest in promoting and sustaining our democracy. The diversity of these organisations mirrors the breadth of the United Kingdom's democracy and they will represent a range of sectors.

Registration and Turnout

Only those who are correctly registered are eligible to vote, which is why registration is such an important measure of the health of our democracy. The Government is focused on encouraging as many people as possible to apply to register so that they can choose to exercise their rights at the ballot box.

An estimated 46.8 million people were registered to vote at the June 2017 UK Parliamentary general election. This was the largest electorate for a UK-wide poll, with approximately 500,000 more electors than at the 2015 general election and 300,000 more than at the 2016 EU referendum. The total number of people registered to vote across the UK also increased by approximately 1.4 million between the end of the annual canvass on 1 December 2016 and the June 2017 election.

The 2017 General Election was the fourth in succession in which turnout increased. Turnout was 68.8% for the 2017 General Election across the UK, up from 66.3% in 2015 and the highest General Election turnout since 1997 (71.4%) per cent, but down 3.5 per cent on the Brexit referendum. This means that 32.2 million people voted, out of 46.9 million who were eligible to do so.

More people voted than in any election since 1992, when 33.6 million people voted. The turnout is the highest proportion since the 1997 General Election, which saw 71.3 per cent of the electorate go to the polls. Turnout among young people at the EU referendum was initially reported at 36 per cent, but later research pegged it at 64 per cent.

Many factors can affect turnout: the proportion of people voting may drop despite an absolute rise in ballots cast, for example if registration grows faster than participation.

This strategy focuses on equipping electors to have their say by ensuring that they are able to vote if they choose to. This includes developing activity designed to enthuse and encourage people to make the choice to participate.

Chapter Eleven: Working Together With Partners

Underpinning our approach to strengthening our democratic society are strong partnerships that enable us to deliver improvements to processes, accessibility and engagement. These include a wide range of organisations, all of whom have roles to play as part of the electoral community. Together we are better able to develop effective policy, understand the requirements of specific groups and reach out to them through a range of channels.

(i) The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission has a unique and independent role at the heart of the electoral community. Their reach, expertise and understanding of the complexities of modern registration means that they are ideally positioned to play a strategic role in promoting engagement. Government recognises that our efforts are enhanced by mutual cooperation and collaborative working on shared objectives.

Government is committed to working with the Electoral Commission to deliver a joined-up approach to longer term registration and engagement challenges. We welcome the relationship that has evolved during the development of this strategy, which has helped to ensure that our goals are complementary and clearly communicated to our common stakeholders. In addition we will continue to work closely to resolve process and access issues that impede voter registration. For example the Government will continue to work closely with the Electoral Commission to ensure the content on both GOV.UK and the Electoral Commission's Your Vote Matters website is as joined up as possible. Electors can be confident that all sources are consistent and guidance on the registration process is comprehensive.

(ii) Local Authorities and Valuation Joint Boards

At the heart of our plans to improve our democratic processes are those who administer the registration and election system. Only by working closely with the teams that deliver these services are we able to build on the successes of IER and online registration and use them as a platform to ensure registers are as complete and accurate as they can be. The Cabinet Office is responding to the need to reduce the additional costs associated with IER by working with the electoral community to make the electoral system more cost-effective and efficient and thus sustainable in the longer term.

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Returning Officers (ROs) and electoral administrators are at the front line of our democracy with responsibility for the administration of electoral registration and the conduct of elections in their local authority area. It is therefore clear that EROs, ROs and administrators have an integral role in encouraging and promoting democratic engagement and ensuring the effective delivery of elections. Furthermore, a number of the projects and work streams are contingent on buy in and involvement from the electoral community. For example, any pilots aimed at testing alternative approaches to canvassing can only be successful if Local Authorities/Valuation Joint Boards and the Electoral Commission lead on their delivery and evaluation.

It is essential to utilise the expertise of administrators in order to test and refine policy proposals and proposed project delivery approaches. We place a premium on ensuring administrators and other stakeholders are kept informed and engaged with the progress and benefits of the different work streams and projects to maximise the prospect of securing their buy in and support.

The Cabinet Office will continue to use multiple channels to harness this front line expertise for the benefit of improving democratic engagement:

- The Cabinet Office convened 'Practitioner Panel' is formed of Electoral EROs and Electoral Administrators from across Great Britain. Representatives from the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA), the Scottish Assessors Association (SAA) and the Electoral Commission (EC) are also members of the Panel. It is constituted to provide practical assistance and guidance to Cabinet Office colleagues, informing, challenging and supporting those officials in developing policies and delivering projects linked with both the modernising electoral registration agenda and the operation of elections themselves.
- A number of other pre-existing forums for administrators are also used with Cabinet Office officials regularly attending or providing written updates to each of the AEA quarterly regional branch meetings across England and Wales. The same approach is taken with regards the regular meetings of the SAA.
- And other forums like the EC's Elections, Referendums and Registration Working Group include administrators from across Great Britain. The Cabinet Office provides regular updates in these types of forums.
- A similar approach is taken with national scale events such as the AEA's annual national conference and SOLACE elections conference with both Ministers and officials participating in plenary sessions and workshops.

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- A similar approach is taken with national scale events such as the AEA's annual national conference and SOLACE elections conference with both Ministers and officials participating in plenary sessions and workshops.
- Formal written communications are shared with administrators at the appropriate juncture on specific projects e.g. a formal notification was sent to all EROs and administrators last summer on the plans for running canvass pilots setting out how they can become involved and the benefits in doing so.
- Regular general written updates are also shared through a weekly Cabinet Office bulletin entitled 'Elections and Registration Round up.'

How We Work With: Local Authorities - Canvass Pilots

Cabinet Office officials collected considerable feedback from the electoral community on the annual canvass which highlighted that the current approach is unsustainable. The Cabinet Office used this information to develop pilot models of alternative methods of canvassing.

During summer 2016, the Cabinet Office used opportunities such as the regional AEA meetings, SAA meetings and bilaterals with the EC to sense check the proposed models and the overall plans for the pilots. This extensive exercise ensured the pilot models could be refined and improved based on administrator expertise in order to give them the best possible chance of being able to be delivered successfully. It also ensured that issues or concerns from administrators could be identified and addressed.

Following this process Cabinet Office invited all EROs across Great Britain to apply to deliver a pilot. Workshops were then held across the country to address any outstanding questions before the application deadline. This extensive engagement helped generate considerable interest among administrators in the pilots, leading to over 70 applications. It has also laid the groundwork for ensuring both piloting and non piloting authorities understand the potential benefits of any reform to the canvass following these pilots. The overarching aim, subject to the findings of the pilots, is to legislate to reform the canvass framework to allow all EROs in Great Britain greater discretion to canvass in more cost effective ways compared with the current prescribed process and thereby allow them to be able to better target their resources where they are most needed. We believe that if we are able to reform the canvass in this way, there is potential to reduce the canvassing costs across Great Britain by over £20 million per annum.

How We Work With: The Electoral Community - Annual Summit

At the AEA national conference 2017, the Minister for the Constitution announced that he would hold an annual summit on elections and registration issues with representatives of the electoral community. The first such summit was held in December 2017. Attendees consisted of senior representatives of the key partner organisations within the electoral community (e.g the EC, AEA, SAA and SOLACE) alongside individual practitioners from across Great Britain. Building on the Minister's extensive engagement with the electoral community through his every voice matters campaign, the summit provided an opportunity to formalise the collection of stakeholder feedback on the operation of electoral registration and elections on an ongoing basis. The aim is to triangulate evidence gathered through this forum in order to determine whether certain aspects of law/guidance or practice need amending to benefit both citizens and electoral administrators.

(iii) Civil Society Partners

Voluntary and civil society organisations play an invaluable role in engaging target audiences that may engage less with traditional media channels. Government has drawn on well-established relationships with key players in the sector in order to promote campaign messages to under registered groups. This has helped target audiences that are harder to reach through traditional media and government owned channels, with civil society groups making an impact ahead of democratic events such as General, Local and Mayoral elections and the EU Referendum.

How We Work With: Civil Society Organisations

Additional funding for democracy and participation advocates such as Bite the Ballot, British Youth Council and Operation Black Vote helped to unlock a reservoir of expertise and on-the-ground organising, as well as social media savvy and online reach. Others such as UpRising turned their experience in motivating young people to get involved in civic action through face-to-face engagement via dedicated street teams in different parts of the UK. Together they generated over 40,000 click throughs to the Register to Vote website ahead of the EU Referendum, with an estimated reach of more than 4 million people.

Specific examples of activity included:

- Mencap focused on social media activity, direct marketing and their 'easy read' guides to reach 75,000 people with a learning disability and their carers to promote voter registration and United response targeted people through search and a special newsletter.
- The British Youth Council's Democracy Champions used Facebook, Twitter and Instagram to engage up to 2.4 million 18-24 year olds in the campaign period.
- Scottish Youth Parliament added a Snapchat filter, encouraging others to register, along with strong partnership work with other Scottish stakeholders.
- Bite the Ballot partnered with Starbucks/Tinder and a range of other corporates to encourage others to register to vote through democracy cafes as well as developing online sharable resources encouraging registrations.
- Operation Black Vote and Voice 4 Change organised a number of community engagement events across the country aimed at reaching members of the BAME community with a discussion about the Referendum and an opportunity to register.

(iv) Government Departments

Democratic Engagement often requires collaboration to develop and deliver policy. This includes working with a range of other departments to deliver initiatives amongst under registered groups, for example with MOD to armed forces personnel and Department for Education to young people and students.

We will also work with the Home Office to understand how extremist narratives can harm democratic engagement. Over generations, we in Britain have built something extraordinary: a successful multi-racial, multi-faith democracy. Our success is underpinned by our distinct, British values – including democracy, the rule of law, individual liberty, and the mutual respect and tolerance of different faiths and beliefs.

Extremists seek to justify behaviour that contradicts and undermines our shared values, and promulgate narratives that, left unchallenged, segregate and isolate communities. This can make people feel less of a sense of belonging and withdraw from society, including the democratic engagement process.

In addition to working together on inter-connected policy areas Cabinet Office leads the cross-government democracy communications group. Our aim is to drive the full force of Government behind increasing democratic engagement, building on our success of the voter registration campaign in 2016. Our approach was to build a network of government communicators that could quickly be mobilised to support campaigns and calls-to-action, for example the mayoral and local election campaigns last Spring.



Chris Skidmore hears the views of partner organisations at the launch of the Every Voice Matters engagement programme.

How We Work With: Government Departments

Through its existing networks and channels the UK Government has many unique opportunities to engage the public with voter registration messages.

Our strategy was to harness the government's existing channels, networks and expertise ahead of the EU referendum to support the Electoral Commission's existing public awareness activity. In addition we established partnerships with a range of groups, civil society organisations, local authorities, tech companies and businesses.

New structures were put in place to manage the activity including named voter registration leads at each government department and a cross-departmental group that met weekly to update on progress and look for links between activity.

There was a co-ordinated social media campaign across government departments. All used Facebook and Twitter, but some also used Instagram, LinkedIn and YouTube. Some Government Departments such as the Department for International Development and the Department for Education created their own audience - specific content which worked particularly well.

Twitter activity had the greatest reach of over 29 million, with 7,424 engagements.

In addition to social media, departments used a wide range of other channels to promote their message. Examples of government-owned spaces that were used to promote the campaign were:

- 700 job centres
- 300 Crown post offices
- 450 driving test centres in the UK
- 500 courts and tribunals buildings and 133 prison and probation sites
- Many Forestry Commission and Natural England visitor sites
- 212 rail stations across the UK and through Manchester Airport group with an average footfall of over 24 million
- magnetic signage on cars owned by the Forestry Commission

Government contact centre messages were amended to include a voter registration reminder. This was done at the following:

- Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) call line - average of 1 million callers per week

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- Her Majesty's Revenue and Customs (HMRC) call line - average of 1 million callers per week
- The Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency (DVLA) call line - approximately 538,000 callers over the campaign
- The Department for Environment Food and Rural Affairs call line - 250,000 calls over the campaign
- The Department for Energy and Climate Change Energy Saving Advice Service consumer helpline - 3,500 callers over the campaign and 600 emails

This activity provided a mix of new ways to engage with the public which are not available to any single organisation working alone. The Electoral Commission welcomed this activity and encouraged a similar approach to be taken ahead of future polls.

In addition we are working with HMRC to try and understand how to effectively incorporate messaging on registration to vote into other formal government processes which engage with the citizen. This includes considering voter registration messaging on national insurance number communications, such as letters to young people when they first receive their number confirmation.

(v) Devolved Administrations

Competence for the local government franchise and for registration for local government elections including Scottish Parliament elections has been passed to the Scottish Government through the Scotland Act 2016. Similar powers are due to be devolved in Wales in 2018. The UK government will retain competence for the Parliamentary registers and Parliamentary elections for all areas of Great Britain. Furthermore, competence for electoral registration and all elections in England will remain fully under the auspices of the UK Government.

Following the devolution of the local government franchise, the Scottish Government has legislated to lower the voting age to 16 for local elections in Scotland and Scottish Parliamentary elections. It is currently considering the scope for further electoral reform. Similarly, the Welsh Government is currently consulting on potential reforms they could make, once the relevant powers have been devolved to them, in respect of Welsh local elections and Welsh Assembly elections. In light of this devolution of powers, it is clear that all three Governments will need to continue to work together to explore collective opportunities and challenges for strengthening our democracy.

How We Work With: Devolved Administrations

We regularly engage with both the Scottish and Welsh Governments, at official and Ministerial level, on a range of projects and workstreams related to electoral registration, the delivery of elections and promoting democratic engagement. We use forums such as the Devolved Administrations Working Group, consisting of officials from the UK Government, Scottish Government and Welsh Government, in order to share knowledge and information in these areas.

For instance, we worked closely with both Governments to develop and deliver secondary legislation aimed at reducing costs associated with electoral registration and making the system more user friendly for both citizens and administrators. This included enabling the emailing of invitations of register to register rather than them having to always be sent by post. Furthermore, the Scottish Government worked in tandem with the UK to take the equivalent legislation the Scottish Parliament as competence for the local government franchise had already been devolved by this point.

We are continuing to work closely with both governments. For example, we are in the process of developing a package of measures aimed at making incremental improvements to the voter registration system. We have been consulting extensively with both the Scottish and Welsh Government as this package has developed and will continue to do so as the work is taken forward.

Chapter Twelve: The Suffrage Centenary Programme

In the Budget 2017 the Chancellor announced £5m for projects to mark the centenary of the 1918 Representation of the People and Parliament (Qualification of Women) Act, including those that help educate young people about the significance of the Suffrage Movement. Cabinet Office is working in collaboration with the Government Equalities Office and Department for Education to deliver a range of programmes to improve knowledge of the UK democracy and encourage civic participation amongst young people.

This high profile work is intended to promote discourse on democratic participation in the context of marking the centenary itself. This is relevant not only to women, who will identify directly with the campaign to ensure that their voices were heard, but to all groups including those whose de facto exclusion continues within the modern age. This issue of social justice and inclusion goes to the heart of our democratic society and remains a challenge that these activities will help to address.

Working with partners from across a variety of sectors the Government will deliver a package of approaches in National Democracy Week and into 2018 to engage young people in the story of suffrage and its relevance to democratic processes with the aim of increasing their knowledge of UK democracy and its importance, and their democratic participation.

These activities, aimed at the next generation of voters, will centre on: providing materials for parliamentarians to connect with and inspire young people to understand how our democratic system and representatives enable change; provide schools with resources on the history of democracy with specific focus on the Suffrage movement, and what this history means in terms of modern day civic engagement and democratic participation; creating democracy ambassadors who inspire their peers to champion democratic participation; and a social campaign that provides an online platform for young people to convey how democracy works and importance and benefit of voting.

Chapter Thirteen: National Democracy Week

On International Democracy Day, September 15th 2017, the Minister for the Constitution announced a new annual week of action which will put the spotlight on democracy and boost participation. National Democracy Week recognises that democracy does not begin and end with an electoral event and aims to promote greater engagement amongst under registered groups in our society.

The inaugural National Democracy Week will be held in Summer 2018, and will be themed on the Suffrage Centenary, celebrating two significant anniversaries next year - 100 years since women won the right to vote and 90 years since women won equal voting rights to men.

Next year's event, to be held between 2-8 July, will bring together organisations from across the public, private and charity sectors for a week of unified national action. The aim is to engage with under registered groups, better understand the barriers they face, and work with partners to ensure that every member of society who is entitled to do so has an equal chance to participate in our democracy and to have their say.

National Democracy Week events in 2018 will take place on a national and local level to reach under-registered groups including young people, black and minority ethnic backgrounds, British expats and people with disabilities, as part of wider efforts to ensure Britain has a democracy which works for everyone.

Launching these plans, Chris Skidmore highlighted his ambition to increase the number of people who understand and take part in our democratic process. This includes those who feel excluded from the democratic debate, face barriers to participation and are less likely to be registered to vote.

“There will be many opportunities for organisations from all sectors to take part and I am confident that the creativity, enthusiasm and experience of our partners will be vital in helping achieve our shared objective of a democracy that works for everyone. That is why I believe that stakeholders should have a key role in National Democracy Week and we will announce in due course our plans for formal involvement”.

National Democracy Week will unite our partners in a shared ambition and message: regardless of who we are or where we are from, we must work together to ensure that every member of our society who is entitled to do so has been able to have that equal chance, that equal right, to participate in our democracy, and have their say.

National Democracy Week Council

The Minister also announced that he would convene a partnership council consisting of organisations with experience of working with under registered groups which will help to develop a programme of events.

The Council will help establish NDW as an annual event of national significance by contributing to developing a model with scope for increased impact year on year. The role of the council will include advising on the activities and events needed to achieve our aims; taking an active role in communicating with and mobilising organisations across the UK; and considering how to measure success and reporting back on the Week's activities.

The Council will be composed of senior figures from across the electoral community, civil society and public sectors. This includes representation from organisations and individuals with an interest in democratic engagement and expertise in engaging different communities, across all UK nations.

Activity will reflect the Suffrage Centenary theme and is likely to include:

- **Call-to-action to stakeholders**

We will use the anniversary of the enfranchisement of women as a focal point to recognise progress, highlight the democratic process, and champion further change to make sure everyone can be involved in our democracy.

- **Programme of Ministerial activity**

We will use the opportunities that this milestone anniversary presents to raise the profile of democratic engagement, the benefits it brings to individuals and communities and how people can get involved. To do this we will work closely with the Government Equalities Office and the Department for Education in support of their Suffrage Centenary Programme to identify opportunities throughout 2018.

In partnership with stakeholders the content and activities for National Democracy Week will develop over the coming months and will be disseminated in the run up to the main event in July. As many organisations as possible are urged to get involved and run events in their local areas, ensuring that everyone from across the United Kingdom has the opportunity to join in and learn about the incredible history of our democracy and how they can take part.

Chapter Fourteen: Conclusion

The Case For Democratic Engagement

The Electoral Commission estimates that around 7 million eligible voters may be absent from the registers. Whilst some of this stock may be due to natural ‘churn’ - temporary absences between elections due to a change in circumstances - a large proportion is likely to consist of people who have never registered or who have left the register for a longer period.

The risk for this group is that voter registration becomes irrelevant to their lives or permanently set aside. This stops them from exercising their democratic rights as individuals, but also has a detrimental effect upon our wider democracy, as it becomes less representative, inclusive and diverse when fewer people take part.

For some, social media activism has awakened an interest in politics and democracy, harnessed engagement and provoked debate. Welcome as this is, government must still make the case for why it is not a substitute for registering to vote. An online petition or shared meme cannot be judged equivalent to the ballot box and the power of a vote cast. We need to address barriers and assumptions which deter those from participating in the formal process in order to help every eligible elector realise their right to have their say.

In particular it is important that we challenge the concept that for some groups, not registering to vote is the ‘norm’. Even in the least well registered groups, such as attainers, the majority are on the electoral roll. Tackling misconceptions that ‘people like me don’t do that’ can help others to resist conforming to a false stereotype. This may also be countered by encouraging active registration from an early age, as there is some evidence to suggest that voting is habit-forming and therefore lasting amongst those who participate from the earliest opportunity.³⁸

The Government will continue to focus in particular on under registered and vulnerable groups. Every elector is equal, but where sections of the population as a whole are less likely to participate we recognise the difficulty that this can present to the vitality of a broad-based, popular democracy. Our efforts will be aimed not only at registration, but towards longer-term engagement activities that promote participation as the norm and place it within the context of citizenship. The transformational potential of IER and online registration is now being realised, and we will seize the opportunities that modernisation brings as we build on our plans for engagement.

The importance of participation is more than an individual concern. It is a broader, social concern too. After all, the right to an equal say is fundamental to our society. Should it diminish, particularly if the erosion is experienced unevenly, some groups will be less included - and therefore heard - in our democracy. This strategy aims to acknowledge and confront this risk so that every eligible elector is encouraged to participate and is supported to do so by our electoral system.

³⁸ [Is Voting Habit Forming? New Evidence from Experiments and Regression Discontinuities, Alexander Coppock and Donald P. Green, Final Pre-publication Version: May 17, 2015](#)

New Opportunities

There are significant opportunities ahead for engaging the country in discussion about democracy and the importance of our system of government. In 2018 the centenary of the first women in the United Kingdom to achieve the right to vote provides a focal point for discussion about overcoming exclusion and the progress we are making towards wider participation. National Democracy Week will harness this momentum and focus our efforts on reaching those who, for whatever reason, do not have a voice in our democratic process.

Charter of Democratic Engagement Values

The principles that inform this strategy are underpinned by values that have guided our approach thus far, and which are grounded in democratic tradition. The charter below sets out our commitment to a fair and open system that works for everyone. We will be inclusive and collaborative, working with partners and a broad range of groups to deliver change. We will strive to make the electoral system more accessible, breaking down barriers whilst ensuring that security and integrity remains paramount. Our efforts will be evidence-led and impartial, as we seek to encourage all eligible electors to play an active role. This reflects the rights and responsibilities of our democracy, as seen in the move towards individual electoral registration; we will communicate and foster this knowledge, sharing information, data and best practice.

<p>Charter of Democratic Engagement Values</p>
<p>Inclusivity and Collaboration</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working in partnership with others is at the heart of Government’s approach to democratic engagement. We will act together wherever possible, drawing on the spectrum of strategic partners, experts and delivery organisations with relevant skills and expertise. • This includes active involvement of a wide range of potential electors and representative groups, including under registered groups (URGs); members of the electoral community; civil society organisations; parliamentarians and other stakeholders.
<p>Accessibility and Security</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will ensure that the widest range of eligible electors are able to access the democratic system, using accurate and targeted communications and user-friendly gateways to participation, including voter registration. • In tandem with accessibility, the security of the registration process is essential to trust and confidence in the wider democratic system. Government will prioritise security in new and existing activities so that users can be sure of a reliable system in which their data remains confidential.
<p>Impartiality and Integrity</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • We will work together with the electoral community to uphold the integrity of the registration process. • This includes a commitment to promoting voter registration amongst all eligible groups irrespective of political allegiance. Materials, messages and channels for dissemination will be party neutral and will not favour specific policies. • In addition we will seek flexibilities and new approaches within existing electoral law; applying rigorous selection standards when testing and evaluating fresh ideas; and allocating funds fairly and in accordance with proper procedures.
<p>Transparency and Responsibility</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Electors can expect an open system in which their rights and responsibilities are clear and understandable. • The guiding principle of voter registration will continue to be individual responsibility, where the onus for ensuring a name is on the electoral roll lies with the person themselves. The Government will continue to promote and support registration through a range of activities, but the final step is the duty of the elector. • We will share information about activities that we undertake and provide analysis and evaluation of Government’s success.

Ambition for 2022

Over the next five years we intend to build on the foundations that have been laid with the transition to IER in 2015 and the launch of the 'Every Voice Matters' engagement programme in 2016. As set out in the preface to this plan, the Minister for the Constitution has identified five core priorities which will be the focus during the coming period.

(i) Better Data, Improved Knowledge

Creating better and more finely grained data surrounding under-registration and democratic exclusion; through this, we are building improved knowledge of where our focused resources need to be placed.

Ensuring that finite resources are directed towards activity that makes a tangible difference is essential to tackling barriers to exclusion. To do so we must first understand more about which groups are proportionally more likely to be under registered and why. Where possible we would like to build further knowledge as to where the issues are most pronounced.

Research will be commissioned to address some of the gaps in our understanding, as outlined in Part One. In addition, an atlas of geographic variation - maps that will offer an accessible one-stop-shop approach to viewing key data - will be developed during 2018. It is intended that this new tool will be updated at fixed points to reflect updated information.

(ii) Modernising Electoral Registration

Continuing to improve our registration system both online and offline, so that it focuses on the needs of the citizen, and modernises and reforms the annual canvass process across the country so that we have the most complete and accurate electoral register possible by 2022.

The electoral community has raised concerns that the current prescribed process is not the most effective method to conduct the canvass for the different types of Local Authorities and their demographics and that a more flexible approach is needed. However, robust evidence will be required in order to proceed with permanent change to the annual canvass.

The 2016 and 2017 Canvass Pilots Projects aim to test whether there are alternative approaches for Local Authorities to conduct the annual canvass process that are more cost efficient and as effective as the current legislatively prescribed process.

The Electoral Commission's evaluation of the 2017 pilots is due by the end of June 2018. This evaluation, along with the findings from 2016, will be crucial in informing future changes to the canvass that could benefit all EROs across Great Britain.

Any proposed changes will need to be viewed in the context of the wider registration system and end-to-end registration process. They will need to be supported by the Electoral Commission's performance management framework, guidance, training and the right mechanisms to support the sharing of good practice.

iii) Every Voice Matters

By recognising democratic participation and electoral registration as an issue of social justice, we are committed to ensuring that those who wish to vote but are prevented from doing so, are the focus of government efforts to make our elections the most accessible ever by 2022.

It is the Government's aim that the next scheduled General Election in 2022 will be more accessible and inclusive than ever before.

As set out in Part One, evidence exists to indicate which groups are more likely than others to be missing out within our democracy. We have committed to build on this knowledge by commissioning further research into the barriers that affect some groups and sharing what we understand of local variation. Our understanding of the statistics will continue to be supplemented with insight developed through discussion with representative groups, visits to communities, expert input and meetings with individuals.

This body of evidence positions us to make targeted interventions to improve access, whether that is by removing physical barriers, promoting digital options, encouraging democratic education or tackling exclusion arising from lack of awareness. In particular there is further work in hand on making registration processes accessible; addressing customer journeys in order to reduce duplicate applications and developing the 'educate' element of the Suffrage Centenary programme.

(iv) A Clear and Secure Democracy

By acknowledging that confidence in our democratic systems plays a crucial role in electoral participation and ensuring that individual voices are protected from intimidation and abuse, we will continue to safeguard our democracy, helping to strengthen trust in our electoral processes.

The Government is committed to strengthening our electoral processes and enhancing public confidence in the rigour of our democracy. Voter ID requirements is an example of how we are taking this forward. It is designed to reduce the opportunity for electoral fraud, enhance public confidence in the security of the electoral system and avoid disenfranchising legitimate voters.

Pilot schemes ahead of the local elections in May 2018 will help to identify how and when it would be best to introduce an ID requirement more widely. We are committed to ensuring that all those with a legitimate right to vote continue to be able to do so, whatever their circumstances. The pilots are being delivered through a project board, whose membership includes the Association of Electoral Administrators and the Electoral Commission.

We have also established a Pilot and Reference Group. Local authorities in this Group are working with the Cabinet Office, the Electoral Commission and the Association of Electoral Administrators to ensure a shared approach to delivering successful pilots.

Cabinet Office Communications and Electoral Commission will advise and coordinate local authorities taking part in the pilots and will begin awareness raising campaigns in 2017 to encourage eligible voters to bring ID to polling stations.

(v) The Democratic Society

Government recognises that we must take a longer-term and more strategic approach to encouraging democratic participation, but depend upon the close working of the electoral community and civil society organisations to help reach out to groups and communities who feel currently democratically excluded.

The first National Democracy Week will run from 2-8 July 2018. As set out in Chapter Thirteen, this will encourage a UK-wide discussion about democracy, with a particular focus on engaging under registered groups. It is a timely event that coincides with the Suffrage Centenary in its first year. However, it is the intention that NDW should develop and grow over the coming years, establishing an effective model for promoting registration and discussion about democracy even in periods where there are no widespread elections.

Planning for the event is already underway, with partners invited to play an active role in inspiring and implementing activities. The diverse range of groups involved will help deliver a broad programme that reaches all electors, including those that have had no previous contact with the electoral system; have participated but subsequently 'dropped out'; or who have decided not to become involved.

This is a powerful opportunity for all those with a stake in democracy to get involved and use this dedicated week to highlight the importance of democratic participation. Reflecting on the monumental struggle for women's votes just a century go we are reminded of the huge progress that has been made in the last 100 years, but also that there is still more to do to widen and strengthen our representative democracy.

Annex A

Participants in the Every Voice Matters Tour

Event	Organisations	Numbers
October 2016		
3rd: Regional Visit to West Midlands (Birmingham)	Birmingham LA Software Supplier UpRising Warwick University	4 organisations
12th: Visit to Wales (Cardiff)	Willows High School students/staff Members of the UK Youth Parliament Cardiff Youth Council	3 organisations
17th: Anonymous Voter Registration Roundtable	Women's Aid Survive Next Link Reigate Women's Aid Solace Women's Aid Imkaan LB Southwark AEA EC NIO	10 organisations 12+ participants
24th: Every Voice Matters Engagement Programme Launch Event	Patchwork Foundation x3	24 organisations

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
	Electoral Commission x2 Elevations Network x3 UpRising x 4 Citizens Advice x 1 Community Organisers x1 Mencap x1 Bite the Ballot x 3 British Youth Council x 2 Universities Uk x 1 HearMe MP x 1 AEA x2 SAA x1 Womens Aid x 2 United Response x 2 Citizens UK x1 Welsh Govt x 1 Voices 4 Change England Community Organisers x1 SOLACE x1 Local Government Association x1 Citizenship Foundation x1 DCMS x1 MOD x2	

Event	Organisations	Numbers
31st: BME Roundtable (London)	Patchwork Foundation (x2 attendees) Voices 4 Change England (x2 attendees) British Muslim Youth UK (x1 attendee) British Chinese Project (x2 attendees) Citizens Advice (x1 attendee) Uprising (x1 attendee) Operation Black Vote (x2 attendees) Citizens UK (x1 attendee) Three Faiths Forum (x1 attendee) Total: 12 attendees	9 organisations
November		
7-8th: Scotland Visit (Glasgow and Edinburgh)	Scottish Assessors Association (x1) Women's Aid (x2 staff) Shelter (x 2 staff)	3 organisations
7th: BME Roundtable (Scotland)	BEMIS Scottish Iraqi Association Scottish Council of Jewish Communities Glasgow Afghan United	8 organisations

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
	International Women’s Group PKAVS Minority Communities Hub (MEAD) Bangladeshi Association Isaro Social Integration Network Scottish Arab Women Association	
15th: Regional visit to North West visit (Liverpool and Manchester)	Amadudu (BAME refuge for survivors of domestic abuse), Liverpool <u>The People’s Museum Manchester</u> Crowcroft Primary School Holy Name Primary School Manchester Muslim Prep School <u>People’s Museum</u> Liz Thorpe Parliamentary Education Service <u>Manchester Uni academics</u> Liz Richardson Andy Russell	2 attendees 3 schools, pupils and staff x 2 x 8 ESMs

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
15th: North West visit (Liverpool and Manchester)	<u>ESM/ HA roundtable</u> Cheshire West and Chester Warrington South Lakeland Manchester Trafford Lancaster Liverpool Greater Manchester St Vincent's Housing Association Bolton at Home	x 2 housing assocs
17th: Great Debate Grand Finale, House of Commons	Elevation Networks	1 organisation

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
29th: Disability roundtable	RNIB	x2 attendees
	MIND	x1
	Mencap	x2
	United Response	x2
	Scope	x1
	Central And North West London NHS Foundation Trust	x2

Event	Organisations	Numbers
December 2016		
1st: Regional visit to Yorkshire visit (Sheffield, Huddersfield and Bradford)	<u>Housing Association RT</u>	8 organisations
	South Yorkshire Housing Association	
	Great Places	
	Guinness Partnership	
	Together Housing	
	Sheffield City Council's Social Landlords	
	Places for People	
	Urban Splash	
	<u>Sheffield Uni Pilot</u>	4 organisations
	University of Sheffield staff	x 4
	Sheffield City Council staff	x 2
	Sheffield Students Union	x 2
	Sheffield Hallam University	x 1
	<u>Democracy Project - Shelley College</u>	3 organisations
	Youth councillors (yrs 8-10)	x 9
Students	x 20	
Dr Andy Mycock, Uni of Huddersfield	x 1	
Diane Sims, Kirklees Council	x 1	
<u>Bradford Community Centre</u>	1 organisation	
Al Markaz UI Islami members	x 8	

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
5th: Regional visit to East Midlands (Nottingham)	<u>Chinese Community Roundtable</u>	4 organisations
	British Chinese Project	x 2
	Dr Bin Wu: University of Nottingham	x 1
	Liz Hampton: Nottingham Welfare Trust	x 1
	Vincent Oh: Chinese events manager	x 1
	Yan Liu: Local Businessman	x 1
	Nottingham Council	x 2
	Intercultural communication project	x 2
	Sports ambassadors/students	x 2
	<u>ESM Meeting</u>	9 councils
	Ashfield District Council	x 1
	Bassetlaw District Council	x 1
	Broxtowe Borough Council	x 1
	Gedling Borough Council	x 1
	Mansfield District Council	x 1
	Newark & Sherwood District Council	x 2
	Nottingham City Council	x 2
	Nottinghamshire County Council	x 1
	Rushcliffe Borough Council	x 1

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
8th: Youth organisations roundtable	Bite the Ballot	x 2
	UpRising	x 2
	BYC	x 1
	Welsh Government	x 1
	Young Foundation	x 2
	NCS Trust	x 1
	UK Youth	x 2
	My Life My Say	x 2
	Step Up To Serve	X 2
	(7 organisations)	
9th: Cardiff University Visit	Cardiff Student Union	X2
	Cardiff Registrar Staff	X1
	(2 organisations)	

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
January 2017		
12th: Frequent Movers Roundtable	YMCA England	X2
	National Landlords Association	X1
	Joseph Rowntree	X2
	Southwark Council	X1
	Lewisham Council	X2
	Manchester Council	X1
	St Mungo's	X2
	Crisis	X1
	Shelter	X1
		(9 organisations)

Event	Organisations	Numbers
24th: Student Roundtable	<p><u>Parliamentarians</u></p> <p>Paul Blomfield MP</p> <p>Office of Ben Howlett MP</p> <p><u>Universities</u></p> <p>Cardiff University</p> <p>Sheffield Hallam University</p> <p><u>Student Organisations</u></p> <p>Elevations Network</p> <p>Association of Colleges</p> <p>Sixth Form College Association</p> <p>National Union of Students (NUS)</p> <p>AMOSSHE, The Student Services Organisation</p> <p>Universities UK</p> <p>National Association of Managers of Student Services</p> <p><u>Local Authorities</u></p> <p>Coventry</p> <p>Canterbury</p> <p>Oxford</p> <p>Cambridge</p>	<p>All X 1 attendee.</p> <p>NUS X 2</p> <p>(20 org/ individuals)</p>

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
	Leeds Birmingham Nottingham Manchester	
26th: Regional Visit to East of England (Cambridge, Great Yarmouth)	Long Road College Sixth Form (Cambridge) Winter Comfort homeless drop in centre <u>Housing Associations Roundtable</u> Freebridge Housing Saffron Housing Broadland Housing Group Ealing House (Care home)	(6 organisations)

ANNEXES: ANNEX A: SUMMARY OF DEMOCRATIC ENGAGEMENT AND VOTER REGISTRATION ACTIVITY

Event	Organisations	Numbers
February 2017		
2nd: London Local Authorities Roundtable	Sutton Waltham Forest Wandsworth Hammersmith & Fulham Brent Camden Haringey Greenwich Hounslow Richmond Ealing Kensington & Chelsea Lewisham Tower Hamlets Southwark	15 local authorities x 1 attendee each
3rd: School Visit, Birmingham	Q3 Academy, Oldbury	1 organisation

Event	Organisations	Numbers
3 March 2017 : Anonymous Registration announcement (Bristol)	Manchester Women's Aid Saheli Asian Women's Project	(2 organisations)
16 March 2017: Regional Visit to North East of England (Middlesbrough, Darlington)	Middlesbrough College Learning and Skills Tubwell Row Centre	(2 organisations)
7 August 2017: Regional visit to the South East of England (Brighton)	Brighton Housing Trust Blind Veterans UK (formerly St Dunstan's) Brighton & Hove Speakout	(3 organisations)
4 September 2017: Anonymous Registration Announcement (Bristol)	Bristol Women's Aid	(1 organisation)
2-3 October 2017: North West visit (Manchester, Warrington)	Manchester BME Network Albert Kennedy Trust (LGBT+ organisation) Priestley College Breakthrough UK (disability charity)	(4 organisations)



A DEMOCRACY
THAT WORKS
FOR **EVERYONE**