



Confirmation Evaluation

An evaluation of ‘confirmation’ – using data matching to confirm electors on the electoral register – in Great Britain

Summary

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Ministerial Foreword

The electoral register is a key building block of our democracy. The Government sees both registering to vote and voting as civic duties and we strongly encourage people to do both. The introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Great Britain this year has seen a major change in how people register to vote. Applying to register is now more convenient, taking no more than five minutes on www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. Since June more than three million people have applied to register this way. It is also now an individual responsibility to register to vote, and new applications must be verified before they are added to the register, to help improve confidence and trust in the electoral register.

Confirmation is a standalone exercise that involves data matching the names and addresses of records on Electoral Registration Officers' (EROs) current electoral register against data held by the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP). It is a key part of the transition to IER, allowing EROs to passport those existing electors who are successfully data matched onto the first IER register – this will simplify the transition for the vast majority of people. This exercise replicates in the live environment the dry run exercise that all EROs took part in during summer 2013.

Confirmation commenced on 12 June 2014 in England and Wales with all EROs participating. In Scotland, the transition started after the Independence Referendum on 18 September so that these two important events did not overlap and potentially cause confusion for electors. An interim evaluation report on live confirmation in England and Wales was published in October finding that 79 per cent of electors matched against DWP. This result has not altered with the inclusion of Scottish authorities. Once confirmation using local data is taken into account, the final results indicate that of 46.7 million electors in the 380 Local Authorities in Great Britain, 40.5 million (87 per cent) were confirmed through DWP Confirmation and, where employed, local data matching activities. This means that for the vast majority of electors, the experience of moving to the new system has not required them to do anything under IER unless their circumstances change (e.g. they move house). This means that the risk of a drop in the electoral register is significantly reduced.

There is still a lot of work to do. The 13 per cent of electors who were not confirmed are being invited and encouraged to apply by EROs over the autumn; those who applied to register to vote at the last household canvass will have until at least the end of 2015 to get on the register under the new system. There are also new electors

and people moving house to get onto the register before next year's General Election. The results of the Confirmation exercise however are encouraging that the transition to IER is proceeding as planned.

Sam Gyimah,

Minister for the Constitution, November 2014

Chapter 1

Introduction and Methodology

The Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 presented a major change to the electoral registration system by introducing Individual Electoral Registration (IER) in Great Britain in order to modernise the electoral registration system and tackle fraud. IER replaced the existing system of household registration from 10 June 2014 in England and Wales and from 19 September 2014 in Scotland. The previous system of electoral registration was based on an annual household canvass sent to each address, which was completed by one individual on behalf of everyone who lived in the house. Under this new system, electors are asked to register individually and are required to provide identifying information such as National Insurance Numbers (NINOs) and dates of birth which will be checked ('verified') before the individual can be added to the electoral register.

A key Government aim is to ensure the electoral register remains as complete and accurate as possible under IER. The Cabinet Office have conducted a series of data matching pilots since 2011 and these identified the use of data held by the DWP to confirm individuals currently on the electoral register without requiring them to provide personal identifiers – these people can be 'passport' across to the new system. This will allow EROs to focus their limited resources on the minority of electors who cannot be confirmed as well as those currently not registered.

Confirmation is a standalone exercise that involves data matching the names and addresses of records on EROs' current electoral register against data held by DWP within an extract of the Customer Information System data (DWP – CIS data). It is a key part of the transition to IER, allowing EROs to passport those existing electors who are successfully data matched onto the first IER register. This replicates, in the live environment, the dry run exercise and is a key tool in aiding the transition to IER.

Confirmation commenced on 12 June 2014 in England and Wales with all EROs participating. In Scotland, the transition was delayed until after the Independence Referendum on 18 September so that these two important events did not overlap and potentially cause confusion for electors. An interim report on England and Wales was published in October 2014 and can be accessed (available with full data sets) at <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/using-data-matching-to-confirm-electors-interim-evaluation>.

Each Local Authority uploaded the required fields from their Electoral Register as provided by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) Order 2013 (S.I. 2013/3907), as amended by the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (Transitional Provisions) (Amendment) Order 2014 (S.I. 2014/449).

The schedule made use of the results from the dry run of confirmation and aimed to allocate an earlier slot to those who had previously achieved lower match rates to allow additional time for local data matching and writing out to a large number of electors designated 'Not Confirmed'. Once uploaded, the Registers were matched against DWP data and the results, detailing the overall Red/Amber/Green (RAG) status applied to each record, made available for download to Electoral Management Software (EMS) systems.

A Green match indicated a positive result, Amber indicated a possible match and a Red match indicated that no match could be found. Additional contextual information was provided, such as an individual RAG status for the address and identity component of each record and details of the fields on which the record was matched (such as first name or middle initial), to give an insight as to why a record was allocated a particular rating.

EROs had the option of conducting additional local data matching (LDM) if they chose. This had the potential to confirm additional electors, assigned a Red or Amber rating through national data matching, using local sources of data such as council tax or housing benefit databases. They could also check DWP Green matches if they chose to.

Reporting

Reports, laid out according to Cabinet Office (CO) designed templates, were produced within the EMS and sent to CO (and subsequently the Electoral Commission (EC) for their independent evaluation) to provide statistics on match rates, broken down by elector type (attainers, postal voters, proxy voters and carry-forward electors) and by wards and polling districts. Additional reports were sent where an ERO had conducted local data matching to detail the number of electors confirmed through this activity and the data sources used.

There were three areas of reporting completed by EROs:

- CLR Monitoring Report 1 (Overall Statistics)
- CLR Monitoring Report 2 (Optional Local Data Matching)
- CLR Monitoring Report 3 (Optional Local Data Matching Sources)

EROs were requested to run the CLR Monitoring Report 1 prior to conducting any local data matching activities¹ and to submit it within ten working days of receiving their match report. EROs were requested to run and submit the CLR Monitoring Report 2 and CLR Monitoring Report 3 ten working days following the conclusion of any local data matching activity.

¹ Some Local Authorities were only able to submit their CLR Monitoring Report 1 after completing local data matching activities.

As part of CLR Monitoring Report 1 and CLR Monitoring Report 2, Local Authorities were asked to provide figures for the number of letters to be sent to electors in each Ward and Polling District.

It was requested that separate reports be submitted for each LA however South Oxfordshire and Vale of White Horse, in England, were only able to submit a joint report and the majority of reports from Scotland were submitted by Valuation Joint Boards (VJBs) representing groups of authorities. By assigning data at ward level to the correct local authority, we are able to provide LA level statistics for Scottish authorities² when looking at all electors³.

It should be noted that all percentages presented in this report have been rounded

²This was not possible for the two English LAs submitting a joint report due to data discrepancies.

³ The number of attainers, postal, proxy and carry-forward electors achieving each RAG rating was not collected at ward level.

Chapter 2

Summary of findings

Key Findings and implications

The dry run of confirmation indicated that, in England, Scotland and Wales, matching registers against DWP-CIS data could achieve a confirmation rate of 78 per cent. In the live run of confirmation, DWP matching surpassed this with a DWP Green rating given to 79 per cent of all electors. The average DWP Green match rate for LAs was 80 per cent and the median was 82 per cent.

The majority of LAs in Great Britain (357) were able to conduct, and report on, LDM. Following LDM activities, 87 per cent of electors in this subset of authorities were assigned 'Confirmed', 13 per cent 'Not Confirmed' and less than 1 per cent 'Undecided'. Prior to local data matching, 79 per cent of electors in the same LAs achieved a Green rating following confirmation against DWP data. As such, the impact of local data matching on LAs conducting such activities was an increase in the proportion of electors confirmed of 8 percentage points. The average confirmation rate for these LAs following LDM was 88 per cent and the median was 90 per cent. The change in the match rate for these LAs ranged from a 5 percentage point decrease to a 32 percentage point increase, with an average impact of an 8 percentage point increase as a result of LDM.

Post DWP matching and local data matching, the final rate shows that 87 per cent of all electors were confirmed and 'passported' onto the register. The average final confirmation rate for LAs was 88 per cent with a median of 89 per cent. The rate ranged from 61% in Hackney to 97% in Epping Forest.

As part of the transition to IER, all electoral registers have been matched against Government records. Where an elector's name and address has been matched satisfactorily they have been transferred onto the new register under IER automatically - in these cases, the elector does not have to do anything, simplifying the change to IER and reducing costs. In transferring 87 per cent of electors onto the new IER register automatically, without their having to make a fresh application, this allows EROs to focus on the 6.2 million that have not been automatically registered under the new IER register and those that are not currently registered to vote in order to increase the completeness and accuracy of the electoral registers.

Any issues to note about the data and further information can be found in Annex B.

DWP Match Results

The national DWP Green match rate was 79 per cent and the LA average match rate was 80 per cent; this ranged from 48-87 per cent, with a median rate of 82 per cent – showing that most local authorities had a match rate towards the higher end of the spectrum. We know from previous pilots, including the dry run of Confirmation, that some groups are less likely to confirm – students, people living in privately rented accommodation, people living in communal establishments and recent home movers (there are clearly some overlaps between these groups). In addition, we know that some address types are more difficult to match due to their more complicated formatting e.g. rooms in student halls of residence. These findings were replicated in DWP confirmation this year with nineteen of the twenty areas with the lowest match rates being urban areas. London areas where there is a high churn, lots of flats and sub-divided properties and a high proportion of privately rented flats made up thirteen of the twenty. Many of the areas are also likely to have high proportions of students for example Oxford, Manchester and Cambridge.

Local Data Matching Results

Most LAs conducted LDM, with the most commonly used source of data being council tax information. Based on the reports submitted to the Cabinet Office, LDM added 8 percentage points to the confirmation rate for the subset of authorities conducting such activities. This ranged from a 5 percentage point decrease to a 32 percentage point increase with an average increase of 8 percentage points.