



Department for Levelling Up,  
Housing & Communities

**Peter Stanyon**

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**Rt Hon Greg Clark MP**

*Secretary of State for Levelling Up,  
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**Department for Levelling Up, Housing  
and Communities**

2 Marsham Street

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1 September 2022

Dear Peter

The Government has long been committed to the rights of British citizens living overseas to vote in UK Parliamentary elections. Our Elections Act 2022 delivers on the government's commitment to remove the arbitrary and anachronistic 15-year limit on voting rights of British expatriates, and extends the right to vote to any British citizen who was previously registered or resident in the UK. Most British citizens overseas retain deep ties to the UK – many still have family here, some will return, many have a lifetime of hard work in the UK behind them and some will have fought for our country. It is right that our citizens are empowered to have a say on how our country is governed.

The passing of the Elections Act in April was a major milestone in achieving votes for life for British expatriates. The next step is to implement the extended franchise through secondary legislation, which is currently being developed and which will be made in Parliament in due course. This secondary legislation is required to create the processes that will enable those newly enfranchised to register to vote and to deliver additional improvements for overseas electors. These processes must be robust to protect against potential fraud and ensure accessibility for applicants, and equally must be workable for electoral administrators. It is in the secondary legislation where the detail of the policy will be clearly set out, including how the extended franchise will operate in practice and what types of evidence newly registering electors may be asked to provide to demonstrate their connection to the place where they are registering vote.

Naturally, our citizens overseas want to know when these changes will be in place. I want to repeat our assurances that the Government intends that legislation will be implemented to facilitate registration of electors from Autumn 2023. This timeline will allow voters and those who administer our elections to understand the new rules and to prepare accordingly

I appreciate that this change confers additional work onto electoral teams, with the necessary increase in administration that the extended franchise brings in registering overseas electors who have been absent from the UK for many years. The Government is committed to supporting the sector to implement this change, along with all the other changes arising from the Elections Act, and we are putting in place a number of measures to assist Electoral Registration Officers and their teams with their responsibilities.

First, as with other changes arising from the Elections Act, the Government will fund the additional registration costs incurred by local government for the registration of newly enfranchised overseas electors under the New Burdens funding doctrine.

Second, the policy is explicitly designed to offset the impact of the extended franchise on administrators. For example, the registration period for overseas electors will be extended from 12 months to up to three years, creating symmetry with the new postal vote cycle, and electors will be able to reapply or refresh their absent vote arrangements at the same time as renewing their registration: these changes are intended to mitigate the additional workload for electoral administrators, whilst ensuring that more overseas electors remain registered, with an absent vote in place, between elections.

Additionally, an online absent vote application service will be introduced allowing electors, including overseas electors, to apply for a postal or proxy vote online. It is anticipated that an online application service will alleviate some of the pre-existing challenges for electors and electoral administrators by reducing the need to rely on manual processes, whilst simultaneously improving accessibility of absent vote applications for all electors. Digital solutions, such as automated data checks, are also being explored in order to aid in the process for registering new overseas electors.

The Government is committed to ensuring readiness of the elections sector to deliver the changes for overseas electors. Close working with key sector stakeholders is ongoing, including with the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Electoral Commission, and the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives, and your input during the development of new processes and implementation plans has been invaluable. The Government's Electoral Integrity Programme will continue to work closely with local authorities throughout delivery, supporting them with the implementation of all the changes in the Act

We live in an increasingly global and connected world and our Elections Act helps ensure that our elections remain secure, fair, transparent and up to date. I would like to thank you and all those working in the elections sector for your ongoing commitment to the successful delivery of our democracy.

I will be sharing a copy of this letter on gov.uk.

**Yours ever,**

**RT HON GREG CLARK MP**  
**Secretary of State for Levelling Up, Housing and Communities**