

Summary of Elections Act changes

Introduction

Since the last UK Parliamentary general election (UKPGE) there have been significant changes to electoral law.

This document provides an overview of the main changes resulting from the Elections Act 2022 that apply to the forthcoming UKPGE.

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Other useful guidance sources

[Electoral Commission Guidance for Candidates and Agents at UK Parliamentary general elections in Great Britain](#)

[Code of Conduct for Campaigners at UK Parliamentary general elections](#)

[Electoral Commission Guidance on Imprints](#)

Changes to voter registration and absent voting

1 Postal and proxy voting

Identity checking requirements on absent vote applications

- 1.1 All absent vote applications (except for emergency proxy applications) made on or after 31 October 2023 must contain a National Insurance Number (NINo) or a reason why one cannot be provided.
- 1.2 The personal identifiers (name, date of birth and NINo) must be verified against Department of Works and Pension (DWP) data.
- 1.3 Where an application fails to match with DWP data – electors are required to provide documentary evidence to verify their identity. Where this is not possible, electors can ask someone to confirm their identity via an attestation.

Online absent vote applications

- 1.4 Since 31 October 2023, electors (except for anonymous electors) have been able to apply for most types of **absent vote online** at:
 - www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote
 - www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote
- 1.5 Electors must upload a photo of their handwritten signature to complete the online application. If an individual is unable to upload a photo of their handwritten signature, they should complete a paper application form.
- 1.6 If an individual is unable to provide a signature or consistent signature due to illness or disability, they may be entitled to apply for a signature waiver. More information can be found on the [Electoral Commission's guidance on signature waiver requests](#).
- 1.7 Electors **cannot** apply online for:
 - proxy postal applications
 - proxy applications due to disability
 - proxy applications due to employment, service etc.
 - emergency proxy applications

These applications must be made on a paper form.

Changes to proxy voting limits

- 1.8 Since 31 October 2023, a person cannot act as proxy on behalf of more than four electors.
- 1.9 Of the four electors, no more than two can be domestic electors. Domestic electors are neither service voters nor overseas electors.

Maximum period for absent vote applications

- 1.10 An elector can have a postal vote in place for a maximum period of three years.
- 1.11 Electors will be required to reapply for their postal vote by submitting a new application when informed by the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO).
- 1.12 Domestic electors who had a long-term postal vote in place before 31 October 2023, can vote by post until 31 January 2026 before reapplying.

2 Overseas electors

- 2.1 Since 16 January 2024, a British citizen¹ can register as an overseas elector regardless of when they left the UK. Previously there was a 15-year limit.
- 2.2 To be eligible to register as an overseas elector, the applicant must have been previously registered or previously resident in the UK.
- 2.3 The applicant's connection to their qualifying UK address must be verified. In most instances, the ERO will check historic copies of the electoral register to verify the applicant was registered to vote. The ERO may also check locally held records or records held by DWP.
- 2.4 If the ERO cannot verify the applicant's connection to their qualifying UK address, they may ask the applicant to provide documentary evidence to confirm their connection to the address. If the applicant cannot provide documentary evidence, they can be asked to provide an address attestation to support their application.
- 2.5 More information can be found in the [Electoral Commission's guidance on voting when living overseas](#).

¹ Including citizens of British Crown Dependencies (Isle of Man, Jersey and Gurnsey).

Changes to nominations and campaigning

3 Commonly used names

- 3.1 There is now greater flexibility in the commonly used names a candidate can use on their nomination form.
- 3.2 Previously, a candidate could use a commonly used name that was different to their actual name.
- 3.3 Candidates can now use a commonly used forename or surname if they use one or more of their names in a different way to their actual name. Or, if they are known by some of their names, such as a middle name.
- 3.4 The commonly used name will appear on the statement of persons nominated, the notice of poll and the ballot paper.
- 3.5 The (Acting) Returning Officer will disallow commonly used names that are likely to mislead or confuse electors or are obscene or offensive. Further information can be found in the [Electoral Commission's guidance on commonly used names](#).

4 Home address requirements

- 4.1 A candidate who wishes to suppress their home address on the statement of persons nominated and ballot paper can now state either:

- the name of the parliamentary constituency or
- the relevant area

in which their home address is located.

- 4.2 The relevant area means:

For home addresses in England:

- if the address is within a district for which there is a district council, that district;
- if the address is within a county in which there are no districts with councils, that county;
- if the address is within a London borough, that London borough;
- if the address is within the City of London (including the Inner and Middle Temples), the City of London; and
- if the address is within the Isles of Scilly, the Isles of Scilly

For home addresses in Scotland:

- the local government area in which the address is situated

For home addresses in Wales:

- if the address is within a county, that county;
- if the address is within a county borough, that county borough.

4.3 If a candidate lives outside the UK, they must state the country in which their home address is situated.

4.4 Further information can be found in the [Electoral Commission’s guidance on the home address form](#).

5 Imprint requirement on digital campaign material

5.1 Imprints are now required on some kinds of electronic or digital material. Imprints are still required on printed campaign material.

5.2 An imprint must include the name and address of the person or organisation who has published the material (the promoter). If they have published it on someone else’s behalf, the imprint also needs to include that person or organisation’s name and address.

5.3 Imprints are required on published digital material and organic material. Examples of published digital material and organic material can be found in the [Electoral Commission’s statutory guidance on digital imprints](#).

6 Candidate election expense limits

6.1 The maximum amount a candidate may spend in the short campaign² has increased.

6.2 The spending limit is based on a fixed amount, plus a variable amount per registered elector in the constituency. The amount per registered elector is different for borough/burgh and county constituencies.

6.3 The spending limit is:

Fixed amount	Variable amount – borough constituency (burgh in Scotland)	Variable amount – county constituency
£11,390	8p per registered parliamentary elector	12p per registered parliamentary elector

6.4 The RO will provide electorate information for calculating spending limits ahead of the poll.

² The short campaign begins on the day after the date an individual officially becomes a candidate and ends on polling day. The earliest date a person can become a candidate is the date of the dissolution of Parliament. If on this date the candidate or others have already announced the candidate’s intention to stand.

Voting and polling station processes

7 Requirement to show photo ID to vote

- 7.1 Electors are now required to show an accepted form of photo ID before voting in a polling station.
- 7.2 The full list of accepted photo ID to vote is available online at: www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need.
- 7.3 An elector can use an expired form of accepted photo ID if the photo still looks like them.

Voter Authority Certificates

- 7.4 If an elector does not have an accepted form of photo ID, they can apply for free photo ID to vote. This is called a Voter Authority Certificate (VAC).
- 7.5 Electors can apply for a VAC online at: www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate. Or they can complete a paper application form.

Anonymous Elector's Document

- 7.6 Electors registered anonymously must have an Anonymous Elector's Document (AED) as their photo ID if voting at a polling station. Anonymous electors must complete a paper application form for their AED. This is provided to them at the point they register.

Voting process in the polling station

- 7.7 An elector's photo ID is checked before they are issued with a ballot paper.
- 7.8 Where an elector does not bring photo ID or brings unacceptable photo ID, they can return to the polling station before the close of poll. Once an accepted form of photo ID is shown, the voter will be issued with a ballot paper.
- 7.9 Every polling station will have a private area for the elector to produce photo ID in private if requested.
- 7.10 More information can be found in the [Electoral Commission's guidance on the voting process](#).

8 Postal vote handling and secrecy

Ban on political campaigners handling postal votes

- 8.1 Political campaigners are banned from handling postal votes, except where the postal vote is their own, that of a close relative ([see paragraph 8.3](#)), or someone

they, or the organisation which employs or engages them, provides regular care for.

- 8.2 A political campaigner is defined on the reverse of the [postal vote return form](#) (see [paragraph 8.8](#)).
- 8.3 A close relative is defined as a spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child, or grandchild. It also includes two people living together as if they were a married couple or civil partners.
- 8.4 Campaigners are permitted to handle postal votes if it is included in the duties of their job or role they hold (for example if a campaigner was employed as a postal worker).

Limits on handing in postal votes at polling stations or at the Returning Officer's office

- 8.5 There are now limits on the number of postal votes a person can hand in at a polling station or at the Returning Officer's office.
- 8.6 A person can only hand in their own postal vote, plus a maximum of five for other electors at each election.
- 8.7 If a person hands in more than the permitted number, all the postal votes (other than the person's own postal vote) will be rejected.

Requirement to complete a postal vote return form

- 8.8 Anyone handing in postal votes at either a polling station or the Returning Officer's office must complete a postal vote return form.
- 8.9 The person handing in the postal vote(s) will need to complete the form with their name, address, and the reason for handing in other people's postal votes (where applicable). They will need to complete a declaration stating they are not handing in more postal votes than the permitted number (see [paragraph 8.6](#)).
- 8.10 They will also need to confirm whether they are a political campaigner. If they are a political campaigner, they will only be able to hand in their own, that of a close relative, or someone they provide regular care for.
- 8.11 If the postal vote return form is not satisfactorily completed, the postal vote(s) will be rejected.
- 8.12 Postal votes posted through a letterbox at the Returning Officer's office, or placed in the internal council mail system will be rejected.

Secrecy requirements extended to postal and proxy votes

- 8.13 The secrecy requirements which apply at a polling station have been extended to postal and proxy votes.
- 8.14 It is an offence to try to find out how someone has voted when completing their postal vote, or to communicate how a postal or proxy voter has voted.
- 8.15 The [Electoral Commission's guidance](#) includes a copy of the secrecy requirements and provides further information.

9 Undue influence and intimidation of voters

Undue influence

9.1 The term 'undue influence,' now defines:

- the use or threatening to use violence against a person, or
- damaging their property or reputation, or
- any activity designed to intimidate a person

as types of illegal behaviour that can be used to unfairly influence someone's vote.

9.2 The full definition of undue influence can be found in the [Electoral Commission's table of offences](#).

9.3 The changes are designed to act as a deterrent against intimidation. It is intended to make it simpler for the police to act when allegations of undue influence are made.

9.4 The new rules apply to all campaign activity, including printed materials, and extend to anyone who seeks to intimidate a voter either inside or outside a polling station.

9.5 Campaigners should follow the [Electoral Commission's Code of Conduct](#) when campaigning outside polling places.

9.6 Any allegations of undue influence should be reported as soon as possible.

Influencing voters at polling booths

9.7 It is now an offence for a person to be with an elector at or near a polling booth and attempt to influence them to vote in a particular way.

Disqualification order

9.8 Anyone convicted of an intimidatory criminal offence motivated by hostility towards a candidate or campaigner will be disqualified from standing or being elected for five years.

10 Accessibility at polling stations

Assistance marking the ballot paper at the polling station

- 10.1 Anyone over 18 can assist an elector in marking the ballot paper, provided they complete a declaration form. They are no longer required to be a close relative or eligible to vote in the election.

Equipment provided at polling stations

- 10.2 Returning Officers must follow the [Electoral Commission's guidance on equipment and materials to be provided at polling stations](#).
- 10.3 We shall take all reasonable steps to provide support for disabled voters at polling stations and provide appropriate equipment.