

Information paper

Quality and Methodology Information

General details

Title of output:	UK Electoral Statistics
Abbreviated title:	n/a
Designation:	National Statistics
Geographic coverage:	UK, Local Authority, Parliamentary Constituency
Date of last SQR or QMI*:	May 2014
Contact details:	Population Estimates Unit, 01329 444661, pop.info@ons.gov.uk

Executive summary

Electoral Statistics are [National Statistics](#) and are published for the UK, its constituent countries, local government areas and Parliamentary Constituencies. They provide annual counts of the number of people who are registered on electoral rolls on 1 December each year. Statistics are collected for the 2 main classifications of voters, the "Parliamentary Electorate" and the "European and Local Government Electorate".

The statistics are compiled from data supplied to the Office for National Statistics (ONS) by Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and are used by government, including Cabinet Office, the Electoral Commission and the Boundary Commission. They are also used by Members of Parliament and the general public.

This document contains the following sections:

- Output quality
- About the output
- How the output is created
- Validation and quality assurance
- Concepts and definitions
- Other information, relating to quality trade-offs and user needs
- Sources for further information or advice

Output quality

This document provides a range of information that describes the quality of the data and details any points that should be noted when using the output.

ONS has developed [Guidelines for Measuring Statistical Quality](#); these are based upon the 5 European Statistical System (ESS) Quality Dimensions. This document addresses these quality dimensions and other important quality characteristics, which are:

- Relevance
- Timeliness and punctuality
- Coherence and comparability
- Accuracy
- Output quality trade-offs
- Assessment of user needs and perceptions

* Quality and Methodology Information' (QMI) replaced 'Summary Quality Reports' (SQR) from 04/11

- Accessibility and clarity

More information is provided about these quality dimensions in the sections below.

About the output

Relevance

(The degree to which statistical outputs meet users' needs.)

ONS collates and publishes electoral statistics which are used by central government departments (such as the Cabinet Office), the Electoral Commission, and by Boundary Commissions when reviewing boundaries to ensure a fair representation in parliament. Other users include Members of Parliament and the general public.

The electoral statistics meet the key user needs in terms of coverage and detail. ONS liaises closely with the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office before data collection commences. The format and details to be collected on the "Summary of Register of Electors" supplied by the EROs to ONS are specified by these key users, as are the boundaries that the statistics are published on. This ensures that user needs are met.

Timeliness and punctuality

(Timeliness refers to the lapse of time between publication and the period to which the data refer. Punctuality refers to the gap between planned and actual publication dates.)

Electoral statistics for the UK are usually published annually at the end of February, around 2 months after the reference date. This time lag reflects the availability of data in the form of a completed response from the ERO for each local authority, and the time taken to process the data and compile the statistics. Electoral statistics are available within the timescale required by the Boundary Commission to allow for their use in Boundary Reviews.

The publication of electoral statistics would only be later than the planned date if essential data used to calculate the estimates were not received or if substantial problems were encountered with processing the data. In previous years, the planned publication date, as entered into the Release Calendar, has always been met but in the unlikely event of a change to the release schedule, an announcement will be made at least 2 weeks in advance, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

For more details on related releases, the [UK government statistics release calendar](#) is available online and provides 12 months' advance notice of release dates. In the unlikely event of a change to the pre-announced release schedule, public attention will be drawn to the change and the reasons for the change will be explained fully at the same time, as set out in the [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#).

How the output is created

For England and Wales, the tables of electoral statistics are derived from data supplied to ONS by EROs at the end of December each year. Data for Scotland are similarly collected by council areas and collated by National Records of Scotland (NRS). Data for Northern Ireland are collected by the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI). ONS then compiles statistics for the UK using the data supplied by NRS and EONI.

Raw data counts supplied to ONS by each ERO are quality assured and any abnormalities are queried with the ERO before the data are used in the compilation of the statistics. The counts of electors and attainers are aggregated to produce electoral statistics by the required geography.

Statistical disclosure control methodology is not necessary as the counts of electors at local authority and Parliamentary Constituency are large enough to ensure that information attributable to an individual is not identifiable in the published outputs. The [Code of Practice for Official Statistics](#) and specifically the Principle on Confidentiality set out practices for how we protect data from being disclosed. The Principle includes the statement that ONS outputs should "ensure that official statistics do not reveal the identity of an individual or organisation, or any private information relating to them, taking into account other relevant sources of information". More information can be found in [National Statistician's Guidance: Confidentiality of Official Statistics](#) and also on the [Statistical Disclosure Control Methodology](#) page of the ONS website.

Further information on the methods used to create electoral statistics is available in this [Methodology Guide](#).

Validation and quality assurance

Accuracy

(The degree of closeness between an estimate and the true value.)

Electoral statistics represent the most accurate count possible of the number of electors on 1 December, based on the information provided on the 'Summary of Register of Electors' by the EROs for each local authority. For England and Wales, missing or incomplete returns are followed up by ONS. If no return is received prior to publication, data from the previous year are used and a footnote against the published table identifies these areas to users. NRS and EONI perform similar follow-up procedures on the information provided by the EROs for areas in Scotland and Northern Ireland respectively. ONS collates and publishes the statistics for the UK constituent countries.

In England, Wales and Scotland a rolling registration system was introduced in 2001 whereby EROs update registers on a continuous basis. From 2014, a system called Individual Electoral Registration (IER) was also introduced, which replaced the previous household based registration system with one in which every individual must register independently. The introduction of IER allows individuals more control over the registration process and increases accuracy by ensuring that the identity of every applicant is verified (using information such as date of birth and National Insurance number) before their details are added to the electoral register.

In Northern Ireland, a system of Continuous Registration was introduced in 2007 which provides monthly updates to the electoral register. A revised register, incorporating all the updates, is published each year on 1 December. However, the summary statistics published reflect the operational date of 1 December and there are no plans for ONS to publish updates between the annual publications.

For England, Wales and Scotland the residence qualification requires a person to be normally living at the address on the qualifying date, even if temporarily absent. People having more than 1 place of residence, such as students, may therefore be included on more than 1 register but are only entitled to vote in one constituency in a general election. In Northern Ireland, the residence qualification requires a person to have resided in Northern Ireland for the previous 3 months before he or she can register. Students in Northern Ireland can register at their home address or term-time address, but not both.

Additional information on the quality of electoral registers following the introduction of IER can be found on the Electoral Commission website in the report [Analysis of the December 2014 electoral registers in England and Wales](#).

There are no statistical quality measures, such as standard errors, relating to the accuracy of electoral statistics as the statistics are aggregated counts and no estimation is involved. The main threats to the accuracy of electoral statistics are non-response and clerical error associated with the completion of the "Summary of Register of Electors" and processing error when the statistics are compiled. Quality checks and procedures, such as consistency checks on calculations, are in place to minimise these threats.

Corrections to errors with published electoral statistics have occasionally been necessary in the past. These corrections were released promptly and in an open and transparent manner and users were alerted in line with the [ONS policy on revisions and corrections](#). Any future revisions and corrections would also follow this policy.

Coherence and comparability

(Coherence is the degree to which data that are derived from different sources or methods, but refer to the same topic, are similar. Comparability is the degree to which data can be compared over time and domain for example geographic level.)

Since 2001, electoral statistics have been derived using data supplied on a reference date of 1 December and the methodology has remained consistent. Prior to 2001, the reference date for the electoral statistics was 16 February.

Since 2012, the reference dates of electoral statistics in different areas of the UK have differed from the standard 1 December due to a number of reasons:

- because of the Police and Crime Commissioner elections held in November 2012, the 2012 electoral statistics for England (excluding London) had a reference date of 16 October 2012. All other areas of the UK had a reference date of 1 December 2012
- because of preparations for the introduction of IER, the 2013 electoral statistics had a reference date of 17 February 2014 in England, 10 March 2014 in Wales and Scotland, and 1 December 2013 in Northern Ireland
- because of the later introduction of IER in Scotland following the Scottish Independence Referendum, the 2014 electoral statistics had a reference date of 2 March 2015 in Scotland. All other areas of the UK had a reference date of 1 December 2014

Electoral statistics for 2014 were published in 2 separate releases. The first release, on 26 February 2015, contained data for England, Wales and Northern Ireland. The second release, on 16 April 2015, provided an update by including data for Scotland and the whole of the UK.

Users should be mindful of boundary changes when comparing time series of electoral statistics. The length of the comparable time series is dependent on the frequency of local authority and Parliamentary Constituency boundary changes. Electoral statistics by local authority are published on the boundaries in place on the reference date. Electoral statistics by Parliamentary Constituency are published on the boundaries required by the Electoral Commission and for some years these statistics have been published on 2 sets of boundaries. The boundaries used are always stated in the metadata published alongside the statistics.

Changes in the electorate can result directly from changes in legislation. On 1 May 2004, for example, the EU was expanded from 15 to 25 countries. This increased the number of people eligible to vote in the European and local elections.

This product is the official set of electoral statistics for the UK and constituent countries. Users sometimes compare electoral statistics to other data sources, for example population estimates, administrative records, or anecdotal evidence. Comparisons between datasets should be treated with caution, as there are always definitional differences in the data collected. Other data sources may cover only a subset of the electoral register, or may include those not registered to vote.

The electoral statistics provide information on the number of people registered to vote. This is not the same as the resident population aged 18 and over for a number of reasons. For example, not everyone who is usually resident is entitled to vote, not everyone who is entitled to vote is registered to vote, and people who have more than one address may register in more than 1 place. Furthermore, there is inevitably some double counting of the registered electorate as EROs vary in how quickly they remove people from the registers after they have moved away from an area or after they have died. These factors have a differential impact from area to area.

Similarly registration rates calculated by dividing electoral counts by population estimates will give only an approximation. Further information can be found in the detailed study entitled [Electoral registration in 2000](#) from the Electoral Commission website.

Concepts and definitions

(Concepts and definitions describe the legislation governing the output and a description of the classifications used in the output.)

Electoral statistics refer to the number of people who were registered to vote if an election had been held on 1 December of the reference year. This is the new reference date for electoral registers. Prior to 2001, the annual canvass resulted in registers that came into effect on 16 February.

There are 2 main classifications of voters: the "Parliamentary Electorate" and "European and Local Government Electorate". Commonwealth citizens, British citizens and citizens of the Republic of Ireland who are normally resident in the area on the qualifying date and who will be aged 18 or over during the electoral register's currency are eligible to vote in any election. However, further eligibility criteria for the 2 classifications are different.

The Parliamentary Electorate includes overseas electors but excludes Peers and EU citizens. The European and Local Government Electorate includes Peers and EU citizens but excludes overseas electors. Overseas electors are not resident in the UK but can vote in a Parliamentary Election if

they have previously been resident in the UK and included in the electoral register (unless they were too young to register). They are registered to vote in the same Parliamentary Constituency as before they went abroad.

Attainers are included in electoral statistics for both the Parliamentary Electorate and the European and Local Electorate. Attainer is the term used to describe a person who attains the age of 18 during the currency of the register, and is entitled to vote at an election on or after his or her eighteenth birthday.

Additional information on eligibility and electoral law can be found on the [Electoral Commission](#) website.

Electoral statistics are published for Local Authorities and Parliamentary Constituencies. Boundary changes are reflected in electoral statistics following the requirements of the Electoral Commission (see the Comparability section above). Reflecting boundary changes ensures the data are fit for purpose for the Boundary Commission and the Electoral Commission. Such changes do not impact on the quality of the electoral statistics in any particular year. However, the statistics cannot be directly compared between years where boundary changes have taken place. Metadata published alongside the tables indicates where the statistics are published on new boundaries.

Other information

Assessment of user needs and perceptions

(The processes for finding out about uses and users, and their views on the statistical products.)

ONS regularly consults users on its statistical work programme. Results of these are available on the [consultation](#) section of the ONS website.

Key users of electoral statistics including the Electoral Commission, Boundary Commissions and Cabinet Office are consulted annually on their requirements with regular meetings being held. In particular, ONS liaises closely with the Electoral Commission and Cabinet Office before data collection commences and the format and details of the data collected each year are specified by these key users.

User views are also sought specifically on population outputs, including electoral statistics. For example, user experiences of population outputs were recorded at a User Engagement Day on 23 November 2010. A note of this event and the latest User Requirements Report are available on the [population methodology](#) pages of the ONS website.

Local area users are consulted through the Central and Local Information Partnership (CLIP) Population Subgroup. The aim of the CLIP Population Sub-group is to improve communication between ONS and some users of population statistics produced by ONS. Minutes from these meetings are published on the Population Statistics discussion board of the [StatsUserNet](#) website.

Sources for further information or advice

Accessibility and clarity

(Accessibility is the ease with which users are able to access the data, also reflecting the format in which the data are available and the availability of supporting information. Clarity refers to the quality and sufficiency of the release details, illustrations and accompanying advice.)

Electoral statistics from 2000 onwards are available on the [UK Electoral Statistics](#) page of the ONS website. Statistics for 1997 to 1999 are available on request by contacting Population Estimates Unit using the email address below. Some data are also available for the period 1991 to 1996 and further information on this is also available from the Population Estimates Unit.

Links from the [UK government statistics release calendar](#) make the release date and location of each new set of statistics clear. The statistics can be downloaded free of charge in Microsoft Excel format. Each publication is accompanied by relevant metadata and additional information is available from a Frequently Asked Questions document and the methodology guide. From 2011 the statistics are also accompanied by a Statistical Bulletin.

Most queries can be answered from the website datasets or Frequently Asked Questions document. Any additional enquiries regarding electoral statistics can be made via email pop.info@ons.gov.uk or telephone on 01329 444661.

ONS's recommended format for accessible content is a combination of HTML web pages for narrative, charts and graphs, with data being provided in usable formats such as CSV and Excel. The ONS website also offers users the option to download the narrative in PDF format. In some instances other software may be used, or may be available on request. Available formats for content published on the ONS website but not produced by the ONS, or referenced on the ONS website but stored elsewhere, may vary. For further information please refer to the contact details at the beginning of this document.

For information regarding conditions of access to data, please refer to the links below:

- [Terms and conditions \(for data on the website\)](#)
- [Copyright and reuse of published data](#)
- [Pre-release access \(including conditions of access\)](#)
- [Accessibility](#)

In addition to this Quality and Methodology Information, Basic Quality Information relevant to each release is available in the background notes of the relevant Statistical Bulletin, available from the [Elections section of the ONS website](#).

Useful links

[ONS Electoral Statistics](#)
[Electoral Commission](#)

Boundary Commissions for:

[England](#)
[Wales](#)
[Scotland](#)
[Northern Ireland](#)