



Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors (CORE)

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Good morning ladies and gentlemen, and thank you for the opportunity to provide you with an overview of the status of the Co-ordinated Online Record of Electors project.

My name is Corey Dykstra and I joined the Department of Constitutional Affairs 4 weeks ago as CORE Project Manager after Tony Bellringer's promotion within the Department. As many of you would know, CORE and its predecessor LASER have a long history, and so, with a consultation paper released last December I think it was also an opportune time for someone from outside the Department to come along and kick the project's tires as it were.

As an aside, I must say it's also has been a fascinating couple of weeks trying to come to grips with some of the intricacies of the UK electoral framework and processes.

But back to CORE. Many of you would have heard of the project and have formed an understanding of what it is all about, but I think it is worth briefly touching on the scope of the project.

CORE Scope

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- **The scope of the CORE Project includes:**
 - Providing a single convenient point of access for national users of electoral register data
 - Support data export to CORE by implementing EML
- **In addition, CORE will provide improved means to:**
 - Detect potential instances of electoral anomalies
 - Request/affect changes to a household's registration details
- **CORE itself will not improve the quality of underlying data held in individual electoral registers**
 - Should ways to facilitate this be considered?

The primary objective of CORE, and of its predecessor LASER, is to provide a single convenient point of access to electoral register data for political parties, the Electoral Commission, and other national users.

Legislation requires political parties to verify the identity of financial donors, and with electoral registers being held at a local level, obtaining this information can involve dealing with a large number of different organisations and sorting through data that may be provided in a number of different formats.

CORE was developed as the answer to such challenges faced by the political parties, and other users of national electoral register data.

CORE would 'mirror' data held in individual electoral registers, and provide a single point of access to a standardised data set for authorised users.

Of course, importing electoral data from each of the over 400 electoral registers is best facilitated by the adoption of a single data exchange protocol. After an earlier consultation process, it was determined that EML, or Electoral Markup Language, was the most appropriate protocol for this purpose. EML has been developed under the auspices of OASIS, the XML interoperability consortium.

Hence, as part of the CORE project, the DCA has been meeting the cost of implementing changes to existing third party and in-house software systems to output electoral register data in EML format. It is important to

Project Status

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1. Support data export using EML

- **Largely complete (T1-8 and T9-13)**
 - QA testing will be completed by end of February
 - Impact of Electoral Administration Bill
- **Implementation**
 - May local elections?
 - User acceptance?
- **Rolling registrations (T14-15)**
 - To obtain agreement from 2 EROs and their software vendors to trial

I would like to focus on the implementation of EML first.

As at the end of February, we will have completed quality assurance testing of system changes made to support the export of electoral register data in EML:

- To support the running of elections (T1-8); and
- To a future CORE database, and to national users of electoral register data (T9-13).

One of the issues that the Department will need to consider in consultation with users is the roll-out by software vendors (and in-house providers) of software updates to users that include this additional functionality. With local elections due in May, the desirability of rolling out new software at this time, and any potential implications for existing electoral processes need to be considered. This is one of the issues that we expect will be discussed at a 'round table' forum on CORE that is being hosted by the Electoral Commission on 10 March 2006.

The standardised EML data output format is essentially being implemented to support a future CORE centralised dataset, and will not replace existing data output formats. However, other users may also choose to take output in EML as it should enable them to develop a single standardised interface to accept electoral register data from any system. That said, it would appear that at the moment, some confusion exists amongst users on precisely how to import and use data that is being provided in the EML format. The Department will be considering what assistance it may be able to provide in this regard

Project Status (cont.)

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2. Access for National Users

- **DCA Consultation Paper**
 - Released 14 December 2005
 - Closes 7 March 2006
 - DCA response due by early June 2006
- **Functional specification**
 - Provide single point of access for national users
 - Additional functionality to be informed by consultation
- **Procurement strategy**
 - Establish appropriate governance framework
 - Establish suitably flexible procurement path

While the implementation of EML as a standard data output for electoral software systems will ultimately benefit users, as I noted earlier the primary objective of the CORE project is to provide a single point of access to users of national electoral register data.

To this end, a consultation paper was released in mid-December 2005, which sought comments on a range of issues, much of which was aimed at determining exactly what functionality should be provided by CORE. This includes for example, the potential for electors to have access to their own registration details, and to request or make changes to such data. An important consideration in this regard is the associated benefits and costs, including the likely impact on registration officers. We are of course also aware that some proposals raised in the consultation paper might require further legislative change.

The consultation period finishes on 7 March 2006, and the Department will provide a response to the issues raised by respondents by early June.

As you know, while the Department has funding to 'build' CORE, the Electoral Administration Bill contemplates the establishment of a 'CORE keeper'. We have been working on the assumption that the Electoral Commission will become the CORE keeper, although a final decision will be informed by the consultation process.

In any event, there is clearly a need to ensure that whoever subsequently becomes the CORE keeper, that party is involved in the procurement of CORE. The Department is currently working with the Office of

Work Program

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- **Standardisation of data export using EML**
 - Review meeting hosted by Electoral Commission on 10 March 2006
 - Stakeholder consultation (ongoing)
 - Establish user acceptance (June 2006)
 - Rolling registration transactions (June 2006)
- **Access for National Users**
 - Establish procurement strategy (April 2006)
 - DCA response to consultation paper (June 2006)
 - Develop functional specification (June 2006)



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