



**28 July 2015**

## Press Release – Elections and Individual Electoral Registration – The Challenge of 2015

Today the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) has published its report on the administration of the UK Parliamentary General Election and local elections held in May 2015 and calls for a fundamental rethink of the electoral process in the UK.

Electoral administrators continue to deliver elections within an increasingly complex and challenging environment even when the odds are stacked against them. This was clearly the situation for the complex elections held on 7 May 2015 following the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration (IER). Electoral administrators and suppliers were stretched beyond belief during the 18 months before polling day with the introduction of IER and the complexities and bureaucracy it brought with it. Preparations for the elections were behind as a result of the impact of the introduction of IER and electoral administrators were exhausted before the election timetable even started. The AEA is acutely concerned that unless the issues identified in the report are properly considered and addressed, the structures, processes, available resources and people delivering electoral registration and elections will not be able to cope with the additional burdens being continually placed upon them.

However, despite everything, yet again electoral administrators successfully delivered complex elections following the most significant changes to electoral registration in over 100 years - but at what cost?

**John Turner, Chief Executive** of the AEA said:

“The AEA has long been of the view that what is required is a root and branch review of the whole arrangements for registration and the conduct of elections rather than more adjustment and change to a system so deeply rooted in the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Many of the problems that currently exist and which surfaced again at this year’s elections are because of the historic nature of the systems in place and which are increasingly becoming unfit for purpose.

Our report provides an account of the experience of electoral administrators in delivering IER and the polls on 7 May 2015 and offers recommendations for improvements to the framework for electoral administration in the UK and which puts the voter at the heart of the process.

This will require urgent joint action by those with a role in shaping electoral policy and practice in electoral administration, and the AEA looks forward to actively working with Governments, the Electoral Commission and other key stakeholders within the electoral community in moving this agenda forward.”

In the report, the AEA makes the following **key recommendations**:

- The UK Government should undertake a thorough and UK-wide review of funding, staffing structures (including career progression) and other resources required to deliver core professional electoral services, with the aims of delivering a coherent and efficient structure across the UK, cost effectiveness over time and ensuring that funding for new responsibilities reaches electoral services. (Paragraph 2.23)
- Fees and Charges should cover the additional costs of administering the electoral registration process in the run up to an election, including absent voting applications and related matters. (Paragraph 2.15)
- The UK Government should bring forward a single Electoral Administration Act in accessible language setting out the high-level framework governing electoral registration, elections and referendums in the UK, with the operational detail of registration, absent voting, and elections contained in secondary legislation, all with the key aim of achieving the simplification and consistency of rules across all electoral administration matters. (Paragraph 2.35)
- Except in cases of unforeseen emergencies, changes to election law should not be applicable to any elections within a six-month period from the date the legislation comes into effect. (Paragraph 2.39)
- The UK Government should design and implement a clearer and local system of accountability and challenge through the introduction in election law of a formal complaints system as outlined in the Law Commissions’ provisional proposal 13-17. (Paragraph 2.42)

- The UK Government and/or the Electoral Commission be asked to investigate the possibility of establishing a national framework of electoral print suppliers in the interests of securing efficiency, resilience and operational certainty for future elections. (Paragraph 4.9)
- The UK Government should review the registration of students and care homes under IER, with a view to making legislative changes to allow Electoral Registration Officers (ERO) to directly register people at "institutions". (Paragraph 5.8)
- The UK Government should carry out a review of IER processes and IER during the UK Parliamentary General Election, with a view to implementing legislative changes to improve such processes, including as to whether there is still a need to continue with an annual canvass if all local authorities were provided with software functionality to easily data mine local authority and government databases. (Paragraph 5.26)
- The UK Government should continue to provide sufficient funding directly to EROs to administer IER to ensure an accurate and complete register is maintained. (Paragraph 5.11)

## **/ends**

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## **Notes to editors:**

1. The Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) was founded in 1987 and is the professional body representing the interests of electoral administrators in the United Kingdom. It is a non-governmental and non-partisan body and has some 1,857 members, the majority of whom are employed by local authorities to provide electoral registration and election services.

2. Read the report in full here: <http://www.aea-elections.co.uk/wp-content/uploads/2015/07/aea-report-elections-and-ier-challenge-of-2015.pdf>
3. Association of Electoral Administrators – A Company Limited by Guarantee - Registered in England and Wales No. 2406897
4. Registered Office: Rice and Co, Harance House, Rumer Hill Road, Cannock, Staffs WS11 0ET.
5. Other relevant detail / context / policy statements / reports...  
[AEA formal response to the Law Commission - Electoral Law: A Joint Consultation Paper](#)