



## Minority Ethnic Matters Overview+PLUS

*MEMO+ is an occasional series of briefing papers on topics of interest to minority ethnic communities in Scotland. It is produced by the **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities** in partnership with the **Black and Ethnic Minority Infrastructure in Scotland**, and is supported by the **Scottish Government**.*

## Briefing: The Electoral Register

### What is the Electoral Register?

The Electoral Register is a list of everyone who can vote in elections, including UK General elections, and elections for the Scottish Parliament, European Parliament, and Local Councils. In order to ensure that it is kept up to date, local Electoral Registration Officers carry out a canvass of electors every autumn by sending forms to every household in the country to check who is entitled to vote. By law, these forms must be returned either by post, telephone, or online. If a form is not returned even after visits from canvassers following up missing information, the householder may be fined.

However, you can apply at any time to have your name added to the register. You do not have to wait until the annual canvass.

There are two versions of the register. The full register, which can be viewed at any local electoral registration office, includes the name and address of everyone who is entitled to vote, and the dates of birth of people aged 16-18. However, copies are only available for use in elections, crime prevention and detection, and the vetting of applicants for credit. It is a criminal offence to use it for any unauthorised purpose or to pass it on to anyone else.

There is also an edited version of the register and you can choose whether or not your details appear in the edited version by ticking the relevant box on the application or canvass form. The edited version is available for sale, and is often used by marketing companies to send advertising material to everyone on the register.

### Who can Register to Vote?

You can register to vote if you are 16 years old or over (although you cannot actually vote until you are 18), and are either a British citizen, or an Irish, Commonwealth, or European Union citizen who is resident in the UK.<sup>1</sup>

<sup>1</sup> For voting purposes, "Commonwealth citizens" include citizens of British Crown Dependencies and British Overseas Territories. European Union citizens can vote in European, Scottish Parliament, Welsh Assembly and Local elections in the UK, but not in UK Parliamentary elections. For a list of relevant countries, see [http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/who\\_can\\_register\\_to\\_vote.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/who_can_register_to_vote.aspx)

However, certain people are not allowed to vote even if they fit these categories. These include:

- Members of the House of Lords (who cannot vote in General elections, but can vote in European, Scottish Parliament, and Local elections);
- Convicted prisoners who are in prison;
- Offenders detained in a mental hospital (Patients in a mental hospital who are not offenders are allowed to vote.);
- People who have been convicted in the last five years of corrupt or illegal practices in connection with an election.

### **Members of the Armed Services**

[Members of the armed services](#) can apply to register either as a service voter or as an ordinary elector. An application as a service voter is only valid for 5 years, so a new application must be submitted if the voter is still serving in the armed services after that time.

### **Declaration of Local Connection**

Homeless people, or people living in temporary accommodation (including voluntary mental health patients and remand prisoners) can apply to register with a [“Declaration of Local Connection”](#). This allows them to register either at their temporary address (including, for example, at a mental hospital), or else at their home address, or a former home address. A Declaration of Local Connection is only valid for 1 year, so a new application must be submitted if the voter is still homeless or in temporary accommodation after that time.

### **Overseas Electors**

[British citizens living overseas](#) can register to vote in General and European Elections if they have been listed in the electoral register within the last 15 years. If they are too young to have been included in the register themselves, they can still register if a parent or guardian has been registered during that time. Overseas applications must be supported by another British citizen resident abroad, who is not a relative. Overseas Electors cannot vote in Scottish Parliament or Local elections.

### **Anonymous Registration**

[Anonymous registrations](#) appear in the register only as a ballot number, without revealing the voter’s name and address. Individuals and households can apply to register as anonymous electors if they would be at risk if their name and address were to appear on the Register of Electors. An application for anonymous registration must either enclose a valid court order or injunction, or else be supported by:

- a senior police officer, or
- the Director General of the Security Service or the Serious Organised Crime Agency, or
- a director of social services, children’s services or social work. An anonymous registration is only valid for one year, so a new application must be submitted each year if the voter is still at risk.

### **Appeals**

The Electoral Registration Officer can review any application if objections are received, or if he or she has doubts about its validity. If the applicant disagrees with the decision, he or she may appeal to the Sheriff Court (in Scotland; High Court elsewhere).

## **Different methods of voting**

The majority of people vote in person by going to a polling station. It is, however, possible to apply to vote by post or proxy so as not to have to attend the polling station.

### **Postal Vote**

Anyone who is registered to vote can apply for a postal vote without giving a reason. The application can be for just one election, for a set period of time, or indefinitely. Ballot papers for postal votes are usually posted to voters a week before the date of the election so, if you are abroad, there may not be enough time to return the completed form by the deadline of 10pm on polling day.

### **Proxy Vote**

Anyone who is registered to vote can apply to appoint another person as “proxy” to vote on their behalf, but must give a reason for their application, for example, that the voter will be away on holiday or business on election day, or would find it difficult to get to the polling station because of disability or lack of transport. The application can be for just one election, for a set period of time, or indefinitely. However, if it is for more than a single election, the application must enclose relevant documentation (e.g. proof of receiving higher rate mobility allowance), or be supported by an appropriate person. These include:

- an employer (if prevented by work from voting at the polling station);
- course tutor (if studying away from home on election day);
- doctor or other relevant health professional (if prevented from voting at the polling station by illness or disability).

Self employed people must have the application signed by someone who knows them.

A person can vote as proxy for any number of close relatives (for example, husband or wife, parent, child, brother or sister), but can only vote as proxy for a maximum of two people who are not close relatives.

### **Postal proxy**

Someone who has been appointed as a proxy can apply to vote by post on behalf of the person who has appointed them as their proxy.

## **Application dates before an election**

- In order to vote in an election, the Electoral Registration Officer must receive a registration application no later than 11 working days before that election.
- Applications for postal votes must be received by 5 pm on the 11th working day before the election.
- Applications for proxy votes must normally be received at least 6 working days before an election. However, if, for example, a voter becomes ill after that date, emergency applications for proxy votes can be made at the local Electoral Registration Office until 5 pm on polling day.

## **Increasing participation**

It is important that as many people as possible vote to ensure that as wide a range of views as possible are represented at the UK, Scottish, and European Parliaments, and in Local Councils. In collaboration with the Glasgow Electoral Registration Office BEMIS are, therefore, piloting an action plan and outreach programme that will

- identify the barriers to registration, and put measures in place to overcome them;
- encourage more people from minority communities to register to vote, especially in areas of traditionally low voter registration;
- build trust, particularly with groups of young people;
- raise awareness of sources of information and help;

For more information, contact BEMIS 0141 548 8047 / [mail@bemis.org.uk](mailto:mail@bemis.org.uk).

## **Useful Links**

### **About My Vote**

<http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/default.aspx>

### **The Electoral Commission**

<http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/>

### **Citizens Advice Bureau: overview of voter registration**

[http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland/your\\_rights/civil\\_rights\\_index\\_scotland/voting\\_procedures.htm](http://www.adviceguide.org.uk/scotland/your_rights/civil_rights_index_scotland/voting_procedures.htm)

### **Application form to be added to the Electoral Register**

[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/why\\_should\\_i\\_register\\_to\\_vot1.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/why_should_i_register_to_vot1.aspx)

### **Information about postal votes**

[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/how\\_do\\_i\\_vote/voting\\_by\\_post.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/how_do_i_vote/voting_by_post.aspx)

### **Application form for a postal vote**

[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/register\\_to\\_vote/postal\\_vote\\_application/postal\\_vote\\_application.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/register_to_vote/postal_vote_application/postal_vote_application.aspx)

### **Information about proxy votes**

[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/how\\_do\\_i\\_vote/voting\\_by\\_proxy.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/how_do_i_vote/voting_by_proxy.aspx)

### **Application forms for a proxy vote (including emergency applications)**

[http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/register\\_to\\_vote/apply\\_to\\_vote\\_by\\_proxy.aspx](http://www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/register_to_vote/apply_to_vote_by_proxy.aspx)



Scottish Council of  
Jewish Communities

The **Scottish Council of Jewish Communities (SCoJeC)** is the representative body of all the Jewish communities in Scotland. It advances public understanding about the Jewish religion, culture and community, and also works in partnership with other organisations to promote good relations and understanding among community groups and to promote equality. (Scottish Charity SC029438)  
<http://www.scojec.org/>



**BEMIS** is the Scottish national Ethnic Minorities led umbrella body, supporting, empowering, and building the capacity of minority third sector community organisations. As a strategic partner with Government, it is proactive in influencing the development of race equality policy in Scotland, and helps develop and progress multicultural Scotland, active citizenship, democracy, and Human Rights Education at the Scottish, UK, and European levels. <http://www.bemis.org.uk/index.html>



The **Scottish Government** is committed to promoting equality of opportunity and social justice for all those who live in Scotland. **One Scotland** is the Scottish Government campaign designed to tackle racism. It aims to raise awareness of racist attitudes, highlight its negative impact and recognise the valuable contributions that other cultures have made to our society – and make Scotland no place for racism. <http://www.scotlandagainstracism.com/>