

Cabinet Office – Supplementary written evidence (ERA0040)

Our reference: TO2020/05601

Dear Lord Shutt,

I would like to thank you and your Committee members for inviting me to give evidence to support your post-legislative scrutiny of the Electoral Registration and Administration Act 2013 (ERA 2013). I am writing to follow up in more detail on a number of the issues raised.

The possibility of a 'dry run' for the national implementation of voter ID in local elections Voter ID has been tested thoroughly in 2018 and 2019 and evaluated on both occasions by the independent Electoral Commission. The subsequent decision by the Government to implement voter ID nationally was based on the thorough analysis by the Electoral Commission and the Cabinet Office of what were highly successful pilot schemes. The Cabinet Office and Electoral Commission will build on the very solid evidence from those pilots and evaluations and continue to work with local authorities to develop and provide the support needed by Returning Officers to ensure the successful implementation nationally of voter ID.

I hope that the Committee will agree that every poll is important and Returning Officers should be supported, as they will be, to deliver each one successfully for their citizens. This means that when voter ID is implemented nationally we need to ensure that it is done so successfully, working closely with our colleagues across the electoral sector.

Extent of engagement with Local Authorities on voter ID

Every local authority in England was invited by prospectus to work with the Cabinet Office and to volunteer to pilot voter ID in 2018 and 2019. 13 local authorities piloted voter ID at elections - Gosport, Bromley, Swindon, Woking, Watford, Pendle, Mid Sussex, North West Leicestershire, North Kesteven, Derby, Broxtowe, Braintree and Craven. 53 local authorities expressed an interest in doing so. 30 local authorities, including representatives from Wales, Scotland and Northern Ireland accepted invitations (along with the Electoral Commission, the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA)) to join a Cabinet Office reference group to ensure voter ID policy was developed and piloted with the direct input of key election stakeholders. Many opportunities were taken by officials and ministers to discuss voter ID plans with local authorities, including at the annual conferences held by partners such as the AEA and SOLACE. Cabinet Office has maintained a close relationship with the pilot authorities and fully intend to embed their expertise and those of other local authorities in our plans for the national implementation of voter ID.

Evidence of the impact of voter ID on ethnic minority groups

The Committee asked for information about the impact of voter ID on ethnic minority groups and any correlation between ethnicity and voters who had attended polling stations and not been able to vote.

Based on both the Cabinet Office and independent Electoral Commission's evaluations of the pilots, there is no indication that any consistent demographic was adversely affected by the voter ID models.

Owing to the practical challenges involved in carrying out a demographic data collection exercise at the polling station, staff were not asked to collect demographic data about the people who did not return with the correct ID. However, the Electoral Commission's evaluation of the May 2019 voter ID pilot schemes does examine the number of people not issued with a ballot paper at a ward level within each pilot, compared with demographic data for the ward. It is probably most helpful to quote directly from the EC's report.¹

Derby, Pendle, Watford and Woking are the only pilots with sufficient diversity in ethnic background to allow for this analysis. Having made this assessment, there is no clear picture across these pilots but we do see noteworthy findings in some areas: In Derby there is a strong correlation between the proportion of each ward's population from an Asian background and the number of people not issued with a ballot paper. In Pendle there is a weak correlation between the proportion of each ward's population from an Asian background and the number initially arriving at a polling station with no ID or the wrong ID. In the 2019 data we do not see any such correlation in Woking and Watford, although in the 2018 pilot in Watford there was a strong relationship between the proportion of Asian residents and the number not issued with a ballot paper.

The Electoral Commission concludes that the evidence is mixed and this correlation analysis does not definitively suggest that Asian voters were disproportionately impacted by the requirement to show ID. We agree with the Electoral Commission that this emphasises the importance of strong and effective public awareness campaigns in all communities, to ensure all voters are aware of the ID requirements and clear about the acceptable forms of photographic ID prior to polling day.

A priority for the Cabinet Office in developing the national model for voter ID has been to identify the most suitable forms of voter ID and the pilot schemes have underpinned our approach to that work. The voter ID requirement should be proportionate and suited to the needs of all voters. The voter ID pilot schemes demonstrated the effectiveness of collaborative working between the Cabinet Office and each local authority pilot to identify the needs of all voters and the most effective ways to communicate the identification requirements to them.

¹ The Electoral Commission May 2019 voter identification pilot schemes, <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/who-we-are-and-what-we-do/our-views-and-research/our-research/voter-identification-pilots/may-2019-voter-identification-pilot-schemes>

Strong awareness raising campaigns and targeted communications helped to ensure that any voter without one of the forms of required ID knew how to apply for a local issued form of voter ID from their local authority. Accordingly we will continue our work with the Electoral Commission, who will be responsible for national awareness raising, and other stakeholders to ensure the needs of all voters are understood and met. Our ongoing commitment to our Public Sector Equality Duty is integral to the work we do.

Election turnout

The Committee asked whether the Cabinet Office has evidence from the voter ID pilots that the voter ID requirement deterred electors from going out to vote.

As part of their evaluation of the May 2019 voter ID pilots the Electoral Commission conducted a public opinion survey and asked non-voters why they did not vote. The Electoral Commission reported the main reason given by those eligible for not voting was that they were too busy (30%). 1% of those eligible to vote who did not said it was because they did not have the right ID and less than 1% said it was because they disagreed with the requirement.

The Electoral Commission also asked respondents whether the requirement to show ID made them more or less likely to vote. Most people in the pilot scheme said it made no difference or made them more likely to vote (90%).

Similarly, the Cabinet Office commissioned a public opinion survey, which highlighted the main reason cited for not voting was 'lack of time' across all models piloted (photographic ID model: 20%, mixed ID model: 13%, Poll card model: 20%). Very few respondents stated a reason related to not having the correct ID (34 out of 1,749 who said they did not vote, or 2%), a similar proportion to the 2018 pilots. This equated to 21 out of 204 respondents in the photographic ID model sites, 10 out of 576 respondents in the mixed ID model sites and three out of 509 respondents in the poll card model sites.

Does the proportion of the population with photographic ID continue to rise?

The success of voter ID will be dependent on the strength of the communication and awareness raising surrounding the policy to ensure that all eligible electors are aware of the photo ID requirement ahead of polling day. The strength of the tailored communication campaigns within each piloting local authority was key to the success of the voter ID pilots. This important work will continue with the Electoral Commission in preparation for national roll out.

Based on data published on GOV.UK by the Department for Transport on 30 January 2020, we know that between 2014-2018 on average 74% of people aged 17 and over in England held a full driving licence. It is likely that this figure would be higher if we take into account the percentage of the population holding

provisional licences and/or non-car licenses as a form of photo identification.

Data from the 2011 census of England and Wales, shows that 76% of residents held a UK passport, 7.4% a foreign passport, and 17% reported holding no passport.

The Government is committed to ensuring that all eligible electors are able to vote, and that is why the list of approved photographic ID will not be limited to passports and driving licences, a broad range of commonly held documents will be accepted, including, for example, concessionary travel passes, PASS scheme cards, Ministry of Defence identity cards and photocard parking permits issued as part of the Blue Badge scheme.

In circumstances where an elector does not have one of the other acceptable forms of photographic ID, they will be able to apply, free of charge, for a local elector ID from their local authority, ensuring that everyone who is eligible to vote will have the opportunity to do so.

What evidence is there of prosecutions for fraudulently completing another voter's signed postal vote ballot paper?

Data on electoral law offences is held and reported by the Electoral Commission. This evidence base is not broken down to reveal evidence of any specific technique for postal voting fraud. However, the Government is clear that electoral fraud is not a victimless crime and it is often the most vulnerable who find themselves targeted. The Government is committed to introducing measures to improve the integrity and security of each elector's vote, whether it is cast at a polling station or remotely. Tightening restrictions around postal voting reduces the risk of fraud and will increase confidence that our elections are secure.

The electoral register in Ireland

I can clarify that in the Republic of Ireland, each local authority is responsible for compiling and publishing a list of voters in its area. This is similar to the system of local registers in Great Britain.

Ministers have been clear that they would like to continue to operate with our existing system and they do not have plans to introduce a national register.

Canada

I read with interest, the transcript from the Committee's evidence session with the Canadian Chief Electoral Officer. I will arrange to have a discussion with the Canadian government at an appropriate time, to find out further information about the Canadian democratic system and revert back to the Committee with my comments.

Peter Lee

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11 May 2020