

Media Handbook

European Parliamentary elections

Thursday 23 May 2019

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Websites

electoralcommission.org.uk

Our corporate website has a dedicated [section for journalists](#) featuring our press releases and statements. It has information on political party donations in the run-up to the election and has a guidance section with information for candidates and those administering the election.

yourvotematters.co.uk

This website provides information for the public on how to register and vote, including forms they can print off to register and apply to vote by post or proxy. It has a postcode search facility allowing people to find contact details for their local electoral registration office as well as polling station and candidate details.

[gov.uk/register-to-vote](https://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

This website is where the public can register to vote online. It is quick and easy to use. Since its launch in June 2014, millions of applications to register to vote have been submitted. We encourage referring to this site in media coverage about the election to ensure members of the public know where they can register.

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1 Logistics

Roles and responsibilities at the poll

The European Parliamentary elections are taking place on 23 May 2019. Seventy-three MEPs are to be elected to the 12 electoral regions in the UK. The distribution of the UK's 73 MEPs is based on the number of people who can vote in each of the twelve electoral regions:

Region	Number of MEPs
East Midlands	5
East of England	7
London	8
North East England	3
North West England	8
South East England	10
South West England	6
West Midlands	7
Yorkshire and the Humber	6
Wales	4
Scotland	6
Northern Ireland	3

Regional Returning Officer (RRO)

Each region has a Regional Returning Officer (RRO). UK Government ministers are responsible for designating an RRO for each electoral region. In England and Wales, RROs must be an Acting Returning Officer; in Scotland, the RRO must be a UK Parliamentary Returning Officer; in Northern Ireland, the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland acts as the Returning Officer.

The RRO is responsible for:

- giving notice of the European Parliamentary election
- the conduct of nomination procedures
- encouraging participation

- calculating votes for each individual candidate/political party and the allocation of seats
- declaring the result

[A full list of the Regional Returning Officers is available on our website.](#)

Local Returning Officer (LRO)

Most electoral regions are broken down into counting areas. The local counting area is the district, borough or unitary local authority area in England, and the local authority area in Scotland and Wales. Northern Ireland is one single counting area.

A Local Returning Officer (LRO) is appointed for each counting area. The LRO is personally responsible for the conduct of the election in that area, including the issuing poll cards and postal vote packs, the organisation and running of the poll and the counting of votes.

The LRO is required to act in accordance with any instructions given by the Regional Returning Officer.

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs)

Electoral Registration Officers (or EROs) are responsible for the preparation and maintenance of the electoral registers and the list of absent voters within their area. They must ensure that the electoral registers are as accurate and complete as possible.

Presiding Officers

Presiding Officers are appointed by LROs to run polling stations. Duties include organising the layout of the polling station, supervising poll clerks, issuing ballot papers, assisting voters, accounting for all ballot papers and ensuring that ballot boxes are transported securely to the count venue.

The Electoral Commission

The Electoral Commission is the independent body which oversees elections and regulates political finance in the UK. We work to promote public confidence in the democratic process and ensure its integrity. Our role in these elections is to:

- produce guidance for RROs and LROs, set performance standards and report on how electoral administrators perform against these standards
- produce guidance for candidates standing for election and their agents
- produce guidance for parties that are campaigning at the election
- produce guidance for non-party campaigners that are campaigning at the election
- register political parties and non-party campaigners
- raise public awareness of the elections and how to take part in them
- report on the conduct of the elections
- publish details of where political parties get their money from and how they spend it

Election timetable

Event	Date (Deadline is midnight unless alternative stated)	
	All electoral regions, except the South West	South West electoral region only
Start of regulated period for political parties and non-party campaigners	No earlier than 23 January 2019	No earlier than 23 January 2019
Official election notice	Not later than Monday 15 April 2019	Not later than Friday 12 April 2019
Start of regulated period for campaign spending by independent candidates	Monday 15 April 2019	Friday 12 April 2019
Delivery of nomination papers and lists of candidates for registered parties	10am to 4pm on any working day after the official election notice until 4pm on Thursday 25 April 2019	10am to 4pm on any working day after the official election notice until 4pm on Wednesday 24 April 2019
Deadline for delivering nomination papers to RROs	4pm on Thursday 25 April 2019	4pm on Wednesday 24 April 2019
Deadline for withdrawing nominations	4pm on Thursday 25 April 2019	4pm on Wednesday 24 April 2019
Deadline for making objections to nomination papers or lists of candidates of registered parties	Between 10am and 12 noon on Thursday 25 April objections can be made to any delivered nomination papers	Between 10am and 12 noon on Wednesday 24 April objections can be made to any delivered nomination papers.
Deadline for objecting to nomination papers on the grounds that an individual candidate may be disqualified under the Representation of the People Act 1981	Between 12 noon and 5pm on Thursday 25 April objections can only be made to nominations delivered after 4pm on Wednesday 24 April	Between 12 noon and 5pm on Wednesday 24 April objections can only be made to nominations delivered after 4pm on Tuesday 23 April

The Commission has [guidance for candidates explaining what will disqualify them from standing in an election](#)

Political party and independent candidates lists are published	If no objections: at 5pm on Thursday 25 April 2019 Objection(s) made: not before objection(s) are disposed of but not later than 4pm on Friday 26 April 2019	If no objections: at 5pm on Wednesday 24 April 2019 Objection(s) made: not before objection(s) are disposed of but not later than 4pm on Thursday 25 April 2019
Deadline to apply to register to vote	Tuesday 7 May 2019	Tuesday 7 May 2019
Deadline for EU citizens to submit declaration form stating where they will vote (UC 1 form)	Tuesday 7 May 2019	Tuesday 7 May 2019
Deadline to apply to vote by post, postal proxy applications, and for changes to existing postal or proxy votes	5pm on Wednesday 8 May 2019	5pm on Wednesday 8 May 2019
Deadline for new proxy vote applications	5pm on Wednesday 15 May 2019	5pm on Wednesday 15 May 2019
Polling day	7am to 10pm on Thursday 23 May 2019	7am to 10pm on Thursday 23 May 2019
Last point at which spoilt or lost postal votes can be reissued	5pm on Thursday 23 May 2019	5pm on Thursday 23 May 2019
Deadline for emergency proxy applications	5pm on Thursday 23 May 2019	5pm on Thursday 23 May 2019
Declaration of result	Not earlier than 10 pm on Sunday 26 May 2019	Not earlier than 10 pm on Sunday 26 May 2019
Last day for delivering spending return of election expenses to the RRO (for individual candidates and the personal expenses of party list candidates)	No later than 50 days after the election result is declared.	No later than 50 days after the election result is declared
	If result is declared on 26 May: 15 July 2019 If result is declared on 27 May: 16 July 2019	If result is declared on 26 May: 15 July 2019 If result is declared on 27 May: 16 July 2019

Last day for submitting non-party campaign spending returns	Friday 23 August 2019	Friday 23 August 2019
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Last day for submitting political parties campaign spending returns to the Electoral Commission (spending £250,000 or less)	Friday 23 August 2019	Friday 23 August 2019
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Last day for submitting political parties campaign spending returns to the Electoral Commission (spending more than £250,000)	Saturday 23 November 2019	Saturday 23 November 2019
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2 Candidates

Becoming a candidate at the European Parliamentary elections

Who can be a candidate?

Candidates in the European Parliamentary elections on 23 May 2019 must be:

- at least 18 years old on the day of their nomination
- a British or qualifying Commonwealth citizen, or a citizen of a European Union country

If candidates are an EU citizen (other than a British, Irish, Maltese or Cypriot citizen), they will be required to make a declaration stating:

- their nationality, date and place of birth, last address in the country where they are a national and home address in the UK or Gibraltar
- that they are not standing as a candidate at the same European Parliamentary election in any other EU member state
- where their name has been entered on an electoral roll in the country where they are a national, the locality or constituency where the candidate's name was last entered; and
- that they have not been disqualified from standing for election in the EU Member State of which they are a national due to a judicial or administrative decision

An EU citizen also has to be resident in the UK to be eligible to stand for election in the UK.

Are there any rules barring a candidate from standing?

The rules around standing for election and the disqualifications that apply are complex. Information can be found in [Part 1 of the Electoral Commission's guidance for candidates and agents](#).

When does someone become a candidate?

The earliest that a person can officially become a candidate is on the last day for the publication of notice of election, which is 12 April 2019 in the South West electoral region and 15 April 2019 everywhere else. If a person has already declared themselves as a candidate at the election then they will officially become a candidate on this date.

If someone declares after 15 April 2019 (or after 12 April if the candidate is standing in the South West) that they will be a candidate at the elections, then they become a candidate on that day, or the date they formally submit their nominations papers – whichever is earliest.

What does someone have to do to stand as a candidate?

All prospective candidates must submit the following to the Regional Returning Officer by 4pm on 25 April 2019 (4pm on 24 April 2019 if standing in the South West region):

- A completed nomination form. Prospective candidates cannot submit the nomination form until the date stated on the notice of election
- Their consent to nomination
- A deposit of £5,000

After the election, the deposit will be returned if the candidate receives more than 2.5% of the total number of valid votes cast in the electoral region.

On our website, we have further [guidance for candidates and agents on standing for election](#).

Who are the candidates?

The deadline for prospective candidates to submit nomination papers was 4pm on 25 April 2019 (4pm on 24 April 2019 if standing in the South West region).

If there were no objections to the nominated papers, the Regional Returning Officer will have published a statement of persons nominated by 5pm on Thursday 25 April 2019 (5pm on 24 April 2019 if standing in the South West region). This will usually be available on the website of the local authority where the respective Regional Returning Officer works.

Political Parties

Who decides which candidates a party puts forward?

In Great Britain political parties use the party list system for the European Parliamentary elections. They decide which candidates they want to put forward and in what order they want them to appear on their list.

In Northern Ireland there are no party lists, but parties still decide internally which candidates they wish to put forward.

Individual candidates, who do not represent any political party, can also stand for election. They can only use the description 'Independent' on the ballot papers (and/or 'Annibynol' in Wales) and cannot use an emblem

Do parties contesting the elections have to be registered with the Commission?

Only those political parties registered with the Electoral Commission can have their name and approved descriptions and emblems appear on a ballot paper. If a party is not registered with the Commission, it can still campaign at elections, but any candidates it wants to stand on its behalf would have 'independent' (and/or 'Annibynol' in Wales) next to their name, rather than a party name.

Do candidates have to stand under a political party name?

No, a person may stand as an independent candidate, i.e. not for any political party.

Campaigning at the election

What can candidates say about one another during the campaign?

As at all elections, it is illegal to make a false statement about the personal character of a candidate in order to influence the result of the election. Rules about defamation also apply to election materials.

The police may investigate allegations of the specific electoral offence of making a false statement. Defamation issues are a matter for the civil courts.

As with all elections, the Electoral Commission does not have any regulatory role in relation to the content of campaign material or what candidates say about each other.

Intimidation of candidates at elections

On 13 December 2017, the Committee for Standards in Public Life (CSPL) published [a report on intimidation experienced by parliamentary candidates at the general election in June 2017](#).

On 6 February 2018, the Prime Minister wrote to the CSPL announcing measures in response to the Committee's findings. From July 2018 to October 2018, the Cabinet Office ran a [consultation on the introduction of a new offence in electoral law on intimidating candidates and campaigners](#). The outcome of this consultation has not been published. The Commission is also working with the police on joint guidance about intimidation.

Are there any electoral rules regarding campaign materials?

By law, candidates, parties and non-party campaigners must use 'imprints' on all their printed campaign material. An imprint includes the name and address of the printer and promoter (the person who authorised the material to be printed). It must be included on all printed material such as posters, placards and leaflets. This is so that electors can be clear about the source of the campaign material. It is an offence not to include an imprint on election material.

Though it is not a legal requirement, the Electoral Commission recommends that candidates, parties and non-party campaigners wherever possible, place an imprint on their electronic materials (e.g. websites, emails and social media platforms). Voters need to know who is targeting them with political messages online and we have called for the law to be changed.

Can candidates see the electoral register?

Once someone becomes a candidate, they are entitled to receive, free of charge, a copy of the full electoral register and the lists of people voting by post or proxy (the absent voters' lists) for the electoral area that they are contesting.

Candidates may only use the full electoral register to help them complete their nomination form, to campaign and to check that donations they receive come from a permissible source.

Individual candidate spending limits and rules on accepting donations

What is the regulated period?

The regulated period is the period in the run up to an election during which electoral spending rules apply to campaigning. Candidates must report all spending which takes place during this period.

The regulated period for individual candidates standing at the 2019 European Parliamentary elections begins the day after a person officially becomes a candidate and ends on polling day, 23 May 2019.

The earliest date a person can officially become a candidate is the last date for publication of the notice of election, which was Monday 15 April 2019 (Friday 12 April, if the person is standing in the South West region.)

If the candidates are a member of a registered political party or already hold some relevant elected office, they need to follow the [rules about donations and loans that relate to political activity before the regulated period](#).

What are the spending limits? (GB)

The spending limit for individual candidates during the regulated period is £45,000 multiplied by the number of MEPs to be returned in the region in which they are standing. Candidate spending limits only apply in Great Britain where the candidate is standing as an independent and not on a party list.

The limits for **independent candidates** in each region are set out below:

Electoral region	Spending limits
East Midlands	£225,000
East of England	£315,000
London	£360,000
North East England	£135,000
North West England	£360,000
South East England	£450,000
South West England	£270,000
West Midlands	£315,000
Yorkshire and the Humber	£270,000

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are each a separate region. Independent candidates standing in any of these countries have the following limits.

Electoral region	Spending limits
Scotland	£270,000
Wales	£180,000
Northern Ireland	£135,000

In Northern Ireland all candidates have a spending limit that is separate from the party spending limit. The spending limit for candidates in Northern Ireland is £135,000.

What activities count towards the spending limit?

Candidate spending includes the costs of:

- advertising of any kind, such as posters, newspaper adverts, websites, online display advertising, promoted social media posts or YouTube videos
- unsolicited material sent to voters, such as letters, leaflets or emails that are not sent in response to specific queries
- transport costs, such as hire cars or public transport for the candidate's campaigners
- public meetings
- staff costs (e.g. an agent's salary, or staff seconded to a candidate)
- accommodation (e.g. a campaign office)
- administrative costs (e.g. telephone bills, stationery, photocopying and the use of databases)

Activities that do not count include:

- payment of a candidate's deposit
- anything (except adverts) appearing in a newspaper or on a licensed broadcast channel
- use of public meeting rooms
- volunteer time including time spent by the candidate's staff that they do not pay them for
- use of someone's main residence, provided free of charge
- use of someone's personal car or other means of transport acquired principally for that person's personal use and provided free of charge
- general computer equipment bought for the candidate's personal use

Who can make donations to candidates?

Anyone can make a donation worth less than £50 to candidates. Candidates are not required to declare donations with a value of £50 or less in their spending and donations return.

Candidates must ensure that any donation worth more than £50 is only accepted if it is from a permissible source. This applies to cash donations and donations in kind. Donations that are not from a permissible source must be returned to the donor within 30 days. After that, the donation may be forfeited.

Permissible donors in the UK are defined as:

- an individual on a UK electoral register
- a GB registered political party
- a UK registered trade union
- a UK registered building society
- a UK registered limited liability partnership
- a UK registered friendly society
- a UK based unincorporated association
- a UK registered company which is incorporated within the EU and carries on business in the UK

Who do candidates report their regulated spending to and when?

Candidates must submit their campaign spending returns to their Returning Officer within 50 days of the election result being declared.

If no spending is incurred, a nil return must be submitted by the candidate (or their agent).

What happens if a candidate exceeds their spending limit?

Allegations relating to the Representation of the People Act (RPA) 1983, including candidate spending offences, are generally made to the relevant local police force to consider.

Whilst the Electoral Commission has a statutory duty to monitor compliance with parts of the RPA relating to candidate and agent expenses, it is not legally empowered to investigate and impose sanctions for offences under the RPA.

[Part 3 of the Commission's guidance for candidates and agents](#) contains further information on spending and donations for independent candidates.

3 Political party election spending and donations

Political party limits and the rules on accepting donations

What is the regulated period?

The regulated period is the period in the run up to an election during which electoral spending rules apply to campaigning. Political parties must report all spending which takes place during this period. The regulated period for political parties began on 23 January 2019 and ends on 23 May 2019.

How much can parties spend at the European Parliamentary elections?

The spending limit for parties is based on the number of regions where they are standing candidates. It is calculated using a formula. The formula is £45,000 multiplied by the number of MEPs to be returned in each region where a party is standing a candidate.

Candidates standing on a party list do not have a separate spending limit. All spending promoting a party list candidate is party spending and must appear in the party spending return.

For example, party Y is standing 3 candidates on a party list in the East Midlands, the party spending limit would be 5 (the total number of MEPs for this region) multiplied by £45,000 = £225,000. The calculation for each region in England is set out in the table below.

Electoral region	Calculation for limits
East Midlands	£225,000
East of England	£315,000
London	£360,000
North East England	£135,000
North West England	£360,000
South East England	£450,000
South West England	£270,000
West Midlands	£315,000
Yorkshire and the Humber	£270,000

Once the formulae is used to calculate the party spending limit in England, this can be spent in any of the 9 electoral regions in England.

If the party is standing candidates in one or more electoral regions in England, it must not exceed the combined spending limits.

For example: party Y stands 3 candidates in the East Midlands and 1 candidate in the West Midlands, the party spending limit is calculated as follows:

- There are 5 MEPs returned in the East Midlands: $5 \times 45,000 = \text{£}225,000$
- There are 7 MEPs returned in the West Midlands: $7 \times 45,000 = \text{£}315,000$
- The party's spending limit is $\text{£}225,000 + \text{£}315,000 = \text{£}540,000$
- The party can spend $\text{£}10,000$ in the East Midlands and $\text{£}530,000$ in the West Midlands
- The party can also divide its spending across the 9 electoral regions in England.

Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland are each a separate region. A party standing candidates in any of these countries has the following limits.

Electoral region	Spending limits
Scotland	$\text{£}270,000$
Wales	$\text{£}180,000$
Northern Ireland	$\text{£}135,000$

All spending that is promoting candidates on a party list in England, Scotland and Wales is considered political party spending and must be reported in the political party return. There is no separate candidate spending limit for candidates on a political party list, except in Northern Ireland.

What activities count towards the spending limit?

Activities included in campaign spending are:

- party advertising of any kind, such as posters, newspaper adverts, websites, online display advertising, promoted social media posts or YouTube videos
- unsolicited material sent to voters, such as letters, leaflets or emails that are not sent in response to specific queries
- the manifesto and other documents setting the party's policies
- market research or other methods of finding out which party people intend to vote for
- party press conferences or other dealings with the media
- party rallies and events, including the cost of people's attendance, and any goods, services or facilities provided

- transport in connection with promoting or publicising the party

Activities not included in campaign spending are:

- permanent, fixed term or temporary staff costs where the staff member has a direct employment contract with the party
- volunteer time
- office running costs, except costs that are higher than usual because of campaigning, such as telephone bills
- people's travel, food and accommodation costs while they campaign, unless the candidate reimburses them
- expenses met out of public funds. For example, security costs for VIP visits
- material sent only to party members
- party conferences

Who can parties accept donations from?

In line with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), before a party accepts any donation or loan of more than £500, it must take all reasonable steps to make sure it knows the identity of the true source and to check that the source is permissible. The party has the legal obligation to check permissibility prior to accepting donations.

Parties can accept a donation from any permissible donor. A permissible donor is:

- an individual registered on a UK electoral register, including those overseas and those leaving bequests
- a UK registered company which is incorporated within the EU and carries on business in the UK
- a UK registered trade union
- a GB registered political party
- a UK registered building society
- a UK registered limited liability partnership that carries on business in the UK
- a UK registered friendly society
- a UK based unincorporated association that carries on business in the UK

In addition, political parties in Northern Ireland can take donations from Irish citizens and UK or Irish companies.

Who do political parties report their regulated spending to and when?

Political parties must report their spending to the Electoral Commission. The deadline for reporting spending of £250,000 or under is 23 August 2019. The deadline for reporting spending over £250,000 is 23 November 2019.

Our website contains further [guidance for political parties in Great Britain campaigning at the European Parliamentary elections](#).

4 Non-party campaigners

Non-party campaigner spending limits and rules on accepting donations

What are the rules for non-party campaigners?

Non-party campaigners are individuals and organisations that campaign in the run up to elections but do not stand as political parties or candidates.

There are two types of non-party campaigns and certain rules apply to their spending within the regulated period. These are:

- Local campaigns: non-party campaigns for or against a candidate in a particular electoral area (for example, for an independent candidate in a region).

For example, a local alliance campaigns for a candidate in the South West electoral region

- General campaigns: non-party campaigns for or against a political party, or particular categories of candidate, including campaigns on policies or issues closely associated with a particular party or category of candidates (for example, candidates representing a party on a regional list in Great Britain).

For example, a charity campaigns against a political party across the whole of the UK.

Local campaigns are regulated by the police. General campaigns are regulated by the Electoral Commission.

Further information about the [rules for non-party campaigners at the European Parliamentary elections](#) is available on our website.

When must a non-party campaigner register with us?

Non-party campaigners must register with the Commission if they intend to spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland.

What are the spending limits for general campaigns?

Campaigners spending more than a certain amount on general campaigning have to register with the Electoral Commission.

The regulated period for non-party campaigners began on 23 January 2019, and will end on polling day, 23 May 2019.

The spending limits for non-party campaigners are:

Part of the UK	Registered with the Electoral Commission?	
	No	Yes
England	£20,000	£159,750
Scotland	£10,000	£18,000
Wales	£10,000	£11,259
Northern Ireland	£10,000	£6,750

In Northern Ireland, the spending limit for registered campaigners is lower than the spending limit for unregistered campaigners. This means that campaigners must not spend over £10,000 in Northern Ireland.

If a non-party campaigner that intends to campaign across the UK, and registers in order to spend over £20,000 in England or £10,000 in Scotland or Wales, it must not spend over £6,750 in Northern Ireland.

Do non-party campaigners have to report donations to the Electoral Commission?

Like political parties, registered non-party campaigners can only accept donations over £500 from a permissible source and must report any donations that total over £7,500 to the Electoral Commission. These donations are reported along with spending after the poll.

When must non-party campaigners report their spending to the Electoral Commission?

Registered non-party campaigners that have spent £250,000 or less must submit their return to the Electoral Commission by 23 August 2019.

5 Electoral fraud

Voting offences

The Representation of the People Act 1983 specifies a number of criminal offences relating to electoral fraud. The relevant police force for the area in which the election is taking place would investigate any allegations that an offence may have taken place.

Every police force has a designated single point of contact (known as a SPOC) to lead on election-related crime, who will give advice to local police officers. People can also choose to contact Crimestoppers anonymously on 0800 555 111.

Anyone, including candidates, politicians and members of the public, who has evidence of electoral fraud taking place should report it to the police immediately, using the 101 non-emergency number, unless there is a crime in progress.

Offences include:

- **Personation** – where an individual votes as someone else (whether that person is living, dead or fictitious), either by post or at a polling station, in person or as a proxy.
- **Undue influence / intimidation** – A person is guilty of undue influence if they attempt to influence someone's vote by:
 - using or threatening force, violence or restraint
 - inflicting or threatening injury, damage, loss or harm
 - impeding or preventing someone freely exercising their right to vote – even where the attempt is unsuccessful.
- **Bribery** – A person is guilty of bribery if they directly or indirectly offer any reward (financial or otherwise) in order to induce any voter to vote or refrain from voting.
- **Treating** – A person is guilty of treating if either before, during, or after an election they offer food, drink or entertainment to corruptly influence any voter. Treating requires a corrupt intent - it does not apply to ordinary hospitality.
- **False statements** – It is an offence to make or publish a false statement of fact about the personal character or conduct of a candidate in order to affect the return of a candidate at an election. False statements that are not about a candidate's personal character or conduct are not illegal under electoral law, but could be considered as libel or slander. It is an offence to knowingly provide a false statement on a nomination paper.
- **Multiple voting and proxy voting offences** – There are various offences regarding multiple voting and proxy voting, including voting (whether in person, by post or by proxy) when you are not allowed to and voting more than once in the same election.
- **False information in connection with registration and absent voting** – It is an offence to supply false registration information to an Electoral Registration Officer. It is also an offence to supply false information for a postal or proxy vote.

What safeguards are in place to ensure postal voting is secure?

Postal voters have to provide their signature and date of birth when applying for a postal vote and also when casting their postal vote. Both records are checked. If the Returning Officer is not satisfied that they match, the ballot paper is not counted.

The system has been further strengthened by the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration in 2014. Anyone applying to register to vote first has to provide their National Insurance number, before going on to provide the additional information above if they want to cast their vote by post.

Responsibilities for combatting electoral fraud

How does the Commission work with political parties to prevent postal vote fraud?

The Electoral Commission has developed a [Code of Conduct for campaigners](#), which applies to all political parties, candidates and their supporters. It covers the handling of postal vote applications and postal ballot packs, behaviour outside polling stations and the reporting of allegations of electoral fraud. In particular, the Code says that parties, candidates and campaigners:

- should never assist in completing a ballot paper - instead, campaigners should always refer the voter to the Returning Officer's staff who may be able to arrange a home visit or provide assistance at the polling station.
- should never handle or take any completed ballot paper from voters. Instead, voters should be encouraged to post their postal ballot pack themselves - alternatively, the Returning Officer's staff may be able to arrange for it to be collected.

The law does not prohibit postal votes from being handled by candidates, parties and campaigners. We want the law changed so that candidates, parties and campaigners do not handle or take completed absent vote applications or postal ballot packs from voters.

What happens if a political party breaches the Code of Conduct?

The Electoral Commission asks political parties to investigate any reported breaches and take action to ensure that problems are not repeated. This includes parties potentially taking disciplinary action against their members.

Who is responsible for putting in place plans to deal with electoral fraud?

The primary responsibility lies with the Local Returning Officer and the Electoral Registration Officer(s) for each area. They must work closely with their local police force.

[Guidance on policing elections](#) has been published to support police officers and SPOCs as they put in place plans to prevent and detect electoral fraud in England and Wales. This guidance, which builds on work previously carried out by the Electoral Commission and the National Police Chiefs Council, now forms part of the College of Policing's Authorised Professional Practice for police forces in England and Wales.

6 Voters

Registering to vote

Who can vote in the European Parliamentary elections on 23 May elections?

A person can register to vote in the European Parliamentary elections if they are:

- aged 18 or over on polling day
- a British citizen
- an Irish, EU or qualifying Commonwealth citizen

British citizens living overseas who are registered as overseas electors within the last 15 years can vote in the European elections. Service voters stationed abroad who are registered to vote can also vote.

What is the registration deadline?

The deadline to apply to register is Tuesday 7 May 2019.

What are the deadlines for applying to vote by post or by proxy?

For applying for a postal vote and a postal proxy vote – 5pm, Wednesday 8 May 2019.

For applying for a proxy vote, except in an emergency – 5pm, Wednesday 15 May 2019.

For applying for a proxy vote as a result of an emergency – 5pm, Thursday 23 May 2019.

To apply for a postal or proxy vote, voters should visit the [Your Vote Matters website](#) to download and complete the relevant application form and return it to their electoral registration office.

In Northern Ireland the deadline for:

- applying for a post vote and a proxy vote – 5pm, Thursday 2 May 2019
- applying for an Electoral ID Card - Friday 10 May 2019
- applying for a post vote or proxy vote as a result of an emergency – 5pm, Wednesday 15 May

How can someone register to vote?

Voters can now go online to apply to register at www.gov.uk/register-to-vote. People can still apply by completing a paper registration form if they prefer. They can contact their local authority electoral registration office for forms or download them from the [UK Government's website](#).

Local authority electoral registration office contact details can be found on the [Your Vote Matters website](#).

EU citizens living in the UK either vote in the UK or in the country where they are a citizen. They cannot vote twice.

To vote in the UK, they need to:

- be registered to vote
- complete a form stating they wish to vote in the UK and not in the country a citizen is from

The EU citizen - European Parliament voter registration form can be downloaded from the [Your Vote Matters website](#).

EU citizens in Northern Ireland should visit the [Electoral Office for Northern Ireland website](#).

Can someone register at two different addresses?

You can be registered to vote at two different addresses, however you can only vote in one place on for the European Parliamentary elections.

It is an offence to vote twice in the European Parliamentary elections.

How do members of the armed services register and vote?

Service personnel and their spouses or civil partners, serving in the UK or overseas, can register either at their home address or their barracks in the usual way, or as a 'service voter'. Service voters fill out an armed services declaration so they can be registered when away from their home address on duty.

Can prisoners vote?

Remand prisoners (those who have not been convicted and sentenced) can vote. Convicted prisoners detained because of their sentence cannot.

In some limited circumstances prisoners released on temporary licence are eligible to register to vote. [Our guidance for electoral registration officers contains more information](#).

The voting process

When will polling stations be open?

All polling stations open at 7am and close at 10pm.

What happens if someone is in a queue to enter a polling station at 10pm?

Any voter who arrives at their polling station and is in a queue waiting to vote at 10pm **will be able to vote**.

What voting system is used in these elections and how do you vote?

In Great Britain proportional representation (closed list) is used. On the ballot paper parties will be listed first, alphabetically, on the ballot paper followed by individual candidates, also alphabetically.

To complete their ballot paper voters in Great Britain mark one cross against either:

- The party they wish to vote for
- The individual candidate they wish to vote for

In Northern Ireland, **the single transferable vote (STV) system is used.**

The ballot papers in Northern Ireland will provide a list of candidates only. Voters mark 1, 2, 3 and so on against candidates in order of preference.

Voting in person

Registered voters can visit their local **polling station** between 7am and 10pm on Thursday 23 May to cast their votes.

- Before polling day, voters will be sent a poll card which includes details of where their polling station is
- Voters can only vote at the polling station specified on this card
- Polling station staff will be on hand to explain the ballot paper(s) and how to vote
- Voters do not need to take their poll card with them to the polling station but doing so will speed up the process

In Northern Ireland, voters must present specified photographic ID at polling stations.

Voting by post

If voters do not wish to, or are unable to go to, a polling station, they may apply for a postal vote. Voters may apply for a postal vote for a specific election, a specific period of time, or for all elections. To vote by post, registered electors need to apply for a postal vote before 5pm, Wednesday 8 May 2019.

- Postal ballot papers will be sent directly to voters about a week before polling day
- Voters should complete their ballot papers and send them back straight away, so they arrive before 10pm on Thursday 23 May
- Votes arriving after 10pm on Thursday 23 May will not be counted. The only exception is if a person is in a queue at a polling station at 10pm for the purpose of returning a completed postal ballot. In that limited circumstance, the postal ballot may be returned after 10pm
- If voters don't leave enough time to post their vote, they may take it by hand to a polling station in their voting area from 7am to 10pm on polling day
- Voters must also remember to complete the postal voting statement – with their signature and date of birth or their vote will not be counted

Voters who cannot sign their name or cannot sign in a consistent manner can apply to the ERO to vote by post without giving a signature. This is commonly called a postal vote waiver application.

Voting by proxy

Voters can register for a 'proxy vote'. This means they ask someone they trust to vote on their behalf for the candidate they wish to vote for. They need to complete and sign a form and return it to their local electoral registration office by 5pm, Wednesday 15 May 2019.

What provisions are made to make voting more accessible to voters with disabilities?

Local Returning Officers should take all necessary steps to ensure that polling stations are laid out with the voter in mind. In particular, the needs of voters with a range of disabilities should be taken into account. The positioning of all of the required furniture and equipment, as well as the positioning of notices, should also be considered, along with the placement of signage within the polling station and external signage.

It is a legal requirement to provide a tactile voting device at every polling station. This allows someone who is blind or partially sighted to mark the ballot paper themselves, once the details on the ballot paper have been read out either by their companion or the member of staff in charge of the polling station (the Presiding Officer). In addition, a large-print version of the ballot paper must be displayed inside the polling station for the assistance of voters who are partially sighted. Enlarged hand-held copies, marked as 'sample', must also be available to anyone who requires them.

The Commission works closely with the Accessibility of Elections Group, run by the Cabinet Office, to consider how voting can be made more accessible. [The Commission has responded to a UK Government Call for Evidence](#) with recommendations on how elections can be made more accessible.

[The UK Government's response to the Call for Evidence](#) was published in August 2018. It lists key findings and actions to be taken to improve the accessibility of future elections.

The Commission provides [guidance to polling station staff](#), (appendix 1 makes reference to accessibility issues) to help them make sure that polling stations are accessible to everyone. This information is available for staff who are running the European Parliamentary elections.

Is it mandatory to use pencils in polling stations? Can a pen be used?

There is nothing in law which states whether a pen or a pencil should be used to mark a ballot paper. Pencils have been used to mark ballot papers for practical reasons: for example, with ink pens there is a chance the ink may dry or spill. Also, ink may cause the mark the voter has made to transfer when the ballot paper is folded, which could lead to the ballot paper being rejected. Should a voter wish to, they are able to use a pen to mark their ballot paper.

Can voters take selfies or other photos in the polling station?

The law relating to obtaining information in polling stations and disclosing such information is complex. Given the risk that someone taking a photo inside a polling station may be in breach of the law, whether intentionally or not, our advice is against taking any photos inside polling stations.

Is it ok for someone to take a picture of their postal ballot and post it on social media showing how they have voted?

Postal ballot papers are treated differently in electoral law, compared to polling station ballot papers. A postal voter may take a picture of their own postal ballot paper and publicise it (including via social media).

However, while the postal voter themselves may publicise the information, if someone else persuades or induces them to make this information available, they would be committing an offence. If there are any suggestions or allegations that this could be happening, the matter should be reported to the police.

Raising awareness of voter registration

What are Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) doing to encourage people to register to vote?

EROs are legally responsible for maintaining the electoral register for their local authority area and are at the forefront of efforts to get as many people as possible onto the registers.

EROs have a duty in law to encourage electoral participation. They will have detailed plans in place to raise awareness of voter registration in their areas. These plans will also set out how they will encourage groups who are less likely to be registered to vote to do so before the registration deadline.

EROs will use a range of advertising methods to reach their local residents, including writing to local residents and many have developed partnerships with local schools and colleges to encourage young people to register to vote.

What is the Electoral Commission doing to encourage people to register to vote?

The Commission's public awareness campaign to encourage voter registration launched on Thursday 18 April and runs until the registration deadline of 7 May. Advertising will take place on digital, online search and social channels, with TV and radio in the week running up to the registration deadline. This will be supported by PR and social media activity. The Commission is also sharing resources for local authorities and other partners to use as part of their public engagement work.

How can other organisations help encourage people to register to vote?

As at all recent elections, the Commission is working with a range of partner organisations – from the corporate, public and voluntary sectors – to try and reach traditionally under-registered voters and encourage them to register to vote. Any organisation that would like to promote these messages should visit our [Your Vote Matters website](#), where they can also sign up for our voter registration newsletter, 'Roll Call'.

7 Count events

The count and declaration of results

Who is responsible for the count?

The relevant Local Returning Officer has overall responsibility for the counting of the votes at their respective election. This includes ensuring Presiding Officers transport ballot boxes from polling stations to the count venue in a secure and timely manner; and that those recruited to count ballot papers have been well trained in how to carry out their duties.

The counts take place locally at designated count centres, and are overseen by the Local Returning Officer from each counting area. The totals for each counting area are then reported to the Regional Returning Officer who must approve them before they can be announced locally.

When will counts start?

The Local Returning Officer should take reasonable steps to begin counting the votes so the results are ready as soon as practicable after 10pm on Sunday 26 May. This is when polling has closed across the whole of the European Union.

Local Returning Officers and their staff must not disclose the number of votes cast for any party or individual candidate (including provisional local totals) to anyone except the RRO or their clerks until after 10pm on Sunday 26 May.

Counting in Northern Ireland will start on Monday 27 May. Apart from UK Parliamentary elections, vote counts in Northern Ireland usually begin on the morning after the polls close and can take 1-2 days due to the more complex Single Transferable Vote counting process.

In Scotland the result will not be declared until Monday. The Western Isles do not count on Sundays. The rest of the local counting areas in Scotland will count as soon as practicable after 10pm on Sunday 26 May.

How will I know when the results will be declared?

No results can be declared until after 10pm on Sunday 26 May.

The relevant local authority will be able to provide projected count times.

Who can attend the count?

The following people are entitled by law to attend the count:

- The Regional Returning officer and their staff
- The Local Returning Officer and their staff
- candidates and one guest per candidate
- election agents

- counting agents
- Electoral Commission representatives
- accredited observers
- any other person permitted to attend by the local Returning Officer

Members of the media and photographers who want to attend a count must contact the relevant local government Returning Officer to request permission to attend the count and declaration of the results.

How are the votes counted and the results announced?

There are four stages to the count process.

- 1. Receipt of ballot boxes:** postal ballot boxes and ballot boxes from the polling stations arrive at the count venue
- 2. Verification:**
 - a. Staff count the postal ballot papers and verify that the number of ballot papers in postal ballot boxes matches the numbers recorded by the Local Returning Officer
 - b. Staff also count the ballot papers from each polling station. They verify that the number of ballot papers matches the number of papers issued, as recorded on the Presiding Officer's ballot paper accounts
 - c. The Local Returning Officer produces a statement showing how many ballot papers have been received against how many ballot papers were expected
- 3. Counting of the votes**
 - Staff sort ballot papers by each political party or individual candidate
 - Staff then count the number of votes cast for each political party or individual candidate
 - The relevant Local Returning Officer will share the provisional result with candidates and their agents. At this point, a candidate or their agent can ask for a recount of the votes. The Local Returning Officer can refuse the request if they think it's unreasonable
- 4. Declaration of the result:** Once the totals for the counting area are approved by the Regional Returning Officer, the Local Returning Officer, will give public notice of the statement of local totals. The Regional Returning Officer will declare the number of votes cast for each candidate and will then announce the name of the candidate(s) with the most votes as duly elected.

What happens with spoilt ballot papers?

Once the verification phase of the count is complete, ballot papers will be sorted by candidate and any doubtful ballot papers will be identified. The Local Returning Officer will adjudicate any doubtful ballot papers in the presence of candidates and agents and the Commission has provided guidance to help them do this.

Spoilt ballot papers are sealed separately to other ballot papers and then the Local Returning Officer will announce how many ballot papers were rejected after they have announced the local results.

How does the opening of postal votes fit into this process?

It's likely that several postal vote opening sessions will take place before polling day, as well as on polling day itself.

The Local Returning Officer must give candidates at least 48 hours' notice of when and where the sessions will take place. At each opening session, the Local Returning Officer will decide whether or not the date of birth and signatures provided by electors on their postal voting statements match the signature and date of birth previously provided and held on record. If the Local Returning Officer is not satisfied that they match, the vote is rejected.

Candidates can observe the process or appoint a postal voting agent to do so. Ballot papers are handled 'face down' at postal vote opening sessions. Anyone attending an opening session must not attempt to look at identifying marks or numbers on ballot papers, disclose how any particular ballot paper has been marked or pass on any such information gained from the session.

All valid ballot papers are placed into ballot boxes and stored securely before being delivered to the count venue for counting after the close of poll.

How are seats allocated?

In Great Britain, the D'Hondt system of proportional representation is used to allocate seats. This means that:

- The Regional Returning Officer will total all of the votes cast for each political party and individual candidate within the electoral region before applying the D'Hondt formula to calculate the allocation of seats.
- The first seat is allocated to the party or individual candidate that has received the highest number of votes cast in the electoral region.

Each subsequent seat is allocated to the party or individual candidate that has the highest number of votes after the following calculation, which is carried out after the allocation of each seat: Total number of votes received ÷ Number of seats political party/individual candidate has already been allocated in the electoral region +1

- The seats that each political party is entitled to are filled by the candidates in the order in which their names appear on the party list.
- Any individual candidate who has been allocated a seat or any party which has been allocated as many seats as there are candidates on its list will be excluded from the subsequent stages of the calculation.

In Northern Ireland, the single transferable vote (STV) system is used.

Voters mark 1, 2 and 3 against candidates in order of preference. The candidates with the least votes are eliminated and their votes redistributed.

This is repeated until there are only the required number of candidates left.

A worked example of the D'Hondt system

Table 1

	Party A	Party B	Party C	Party D	Party E
Votes	330,000	280,000	160,000	60,000	15,000
Seat 1	330,000	280,000	160,000	60,000	15,000
Seat 2	165,000	280,000	160,000	60,000	15,000
Seat 3	165,000	140,000	160,000	60,000	15,000
Seat 4	110,000	140,000	160,000	60,000	15,000
Total seats	2	1	1	0	0

In the worked example in Table 1, there are four seats available and these have been allocated as follows:

- Seat 1 – Party A obtained the highest number of votes (330,000) and is therefore entitled to the first available seat.
- Seat 2 – The allocation of the next seat is calculated by dividing the total number of votes each list received by the number of seats it has already been allocated in the electoral region, plus one. As a result, Party A's original total must be divided by two, while the other parties' totals are still divided by one. Party B, with its total of 280,000, wins the second seat.
- Seat 3 – To calculate the allocation of the third seat, both Party A's and Party B's total number of votes are divided by two, while Party C and Party D still have their totals divided by one. This results in this seat being allocated to Party A with its total of 165,000.
- Seat 4 – As Party A now has two seats, its original total of 330,000 is divided by three. At this stage, Party C, with a total of 160,000, wins the fourth and final seat.

Can the result be challenged after it has been announced?

Someone can challenge the result of a European Parliamentary election by issuing an election petition. This is a legal action and will be adjudicated by a judge in court.

A petition at a European Parliamentary election must normally be presented within 21 calendar days after the day on which the election was held. Further time may be allowed in certain circumstances.

[The Law Commissions published a joint interim report](#) on 4 February 2016 recommending that the process for challenging elections should be modernised, making it easier for parties to understand and use, and that judges be given the power, in appropriate cases, to limit the potential costs for challengers. This is supported by the Electoral Commission.

For more information challenging the result of an election, see [Part 6 of our Guidance for candidates and agents for principal area elections](#).

Can I film at count events?

Members of the media and photographers wishing to attend and film at count events must seek advance permission from the relevant local government Returning Officer.