

Electoral Statistics - Background

1. The Electoral Register

The electoral register is a list of all people who are registered to vote in elections and referendums. The creation and maintenance of the electoral register is the responsibility of local electoral registration offices. There are 15 such offices in Scotland.

1.1 Maintaining the Electoral Register

Each of the 15 local electoral registration offices in Scotland maintains the electoral register for its own area. This is generally done by means of an annual canvass and a process of rolling registration. In addition, Electoral Registration Officers may use information held by the council(s) that appointed them to ensure that the register is as complete and accurate as possible.

Annual Canvass

In the autumn of each year, a canvass is conducted by local electoral registration officers. A form is sent to every domestic address to find out who should be registered to vote. Forms are generally sent out by post, and householders are expected to return the completed or amended form on the basis of their circumstances at 15th October. In the event that a form is not returned, the Electoral Registration Officer will endeavour to obtain the necessary information by other means. In the event that no information is available, the registration information from the previous year may be carried forward for one year.

Rolling Registration

A system of 'rolling registration' was introduced in 2001 which allows the register to be voluntarily updated outside the period of the annual canvass. Thus, for example, in the event of a household or person moving home, electors can update their registration accordingly.

The information presented in these tables is derived using the data supplied by the 15 Electoral Registration Officers using the full register published on 1st December each year. To ensure the best possible quality of the published figures, this process involves close working with the Boundary Commission for Scotland, who hold a copy of the electoral register and produce similar statistical outputs for the purpose of monitoring and reviewing electoral boundaries in Scotland.

It therefore provides a definitive picture of electoral registration across Scotland, and allows some comparison with electoral registration in other parts of the United Kingdom. In addition, it provides a historical record of electoral registration, showing the results of boundary changes and changes over time as appropriate.

1.2 Eligibility

A person can register to vote if he/she:

- will be 18 years or over during the currency of the register (from 1st December to 30th November) (go to [Attainers](#));

- is a UK, Republic of Ireland or qualifying Commonwealth citizen. Qualifying Commonwealth citizens are those who have leave to enter or remain in the UK, or do not require such leave;
- is a citizen of a European Union country living in the UK;
- is a citizen of the Channel Islands, the Isle of Man or a British Overseas Territory living in the UK.

The requirements for those who can vote differ by type of election and the following general rules are applied. (For more detail on these rules, see the Who Can Register on the About My Vote website: www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/who_can_register_to_vote.aspx.)

To vote in United Kingdom (UK) Parliament elections a person must be:

- aged 18 or older on the day of the election (go to [Attainers](#));
- a British, Irish or Commonwealth citizen resident in the UK (go to [Residents](#)); or
- a British citizen who has been living abroad for up to 15 years and registered as an overseas elector (go to [Overseas electors](#)); or
- a British citizen living abroad and registered as a service elector (go to [Service electors](#)).

Members of the House of Lords and citizens of the European Union (EU) (except Ireland or countries which are also members of the Commonwealth as above) are not entitled to vote in UK Parliament elections.

Members of the House of Lords and EU citizens living in Scotland are eligible to vote in Local Government or Scottish Parliament elections, along with anyone in any of the above categories (with the exception of [overseas electors](#)).

The European Parliament electorate consists of the UK Parliament electorate as well as members of the House of Lords. It also includes EU citizens living in the UK who have applied to vote in European elections in the UK instead of in their home country.

The electorate for a referendum will be specified in the legislation that requires a referendum to be held.

People may be registered at more than one address (such as students with term-time and vacation addresses, or somebody with a holiday home), but an elector is not entitled to vote more than once in an election to the same elected body.

An illustration of voting eligibilities is given in [Appendix 1, Diagram 1](#).

Definitions

Attainers:

Eligibility to vote is conditional on the voter being aged 18 or over on the date of the relevant election or referendum. The electoral register includes people who will attain the age of 18 during the currency of the register (between 1st December and 30th November the following year). They are called attainers. Note that in the published

tables, whilst attainers are identified separately, they are also included as part of the total electorate figures.

Residents:

In order to be classed as 'resident' in a constituency the elector must be normally living at the address on the qualifying date of 15th October. If the elector is temporarily absent (e.g. on holiday or away at university) this will not disqualify them from being classed as resident.

Overseas electors:

Those who are not resident in the UK, but have been resident here and included in the electoral register within a period of 15 years of the qualifying date for the current register (or resident here and too young to be registered at the time of residence). They are registered in the same parliamentary constituency as before they went abroad or, if they were too young to register, in the constituency where their parent or guardian was registered. Overseas electors cannot vote in Local Government elections or Scottish Parliament elections but are entitled to vote in UK Parliamentary and European Parliamentary elections.

Service electors:

Service electors are members of HM Armed Forces and their spouses, plus Crown servants and British Council employees and their spouses residing abroad. They do not register in the same way as residents and may not necessarily reside in the area of registration. Armed forces' spouses have the option of registering as residents while in the UK. The number of Service electors has remained fairly constant over the last few years, and is substantially less than the numbers of Service electors in previous years owing to a change in legislation. This introduced new rules for Service electors whereby Service elector applications are required to be completed every three years rather than indefinitely as previously. This means that many Service electors may not have renewed their application because they have now left the Services, or have opted to register as a civilian elector - as they are entitled to do.

Voluntary patients resident in mental health institutions:

Following changes in legislation, voluntary patients who were resident in a mental health institution but who were not liable to be detained there can now use a Declaration of Local Connection to give the hospital address as their qualifying address for registration purposes. Voluntary patients are therefore no longer categorised separately and have been absorbed into the main body of the electorate.

1.3 Quality of the Electoral Register

As part of a continued effort to improve the quality of the register, the Electoral Commission conducts research on the accuracy and completeness of electoral registration. Reports from these studies are available on the Electoral Commission website: www.electoralcommission.org.uk/publications-and-research/policy-and-research

1.4 Electoral Geographies

Electoral boundaries can sometimes coincide with other administrative area boundaries such as council areas and health board areas or statistical data zones, but as a rule comparisons across the different types of geographies are not straightforward. In

addition electoral boundaries change as a result of regular boundary reviews, making analysis of change over time difficult.

UK Parliamentary Constituencies

There are currently 59 UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland (also known as Scottish Westminster constituencies) as defined in the Parliamentary Constituencies (SCOTLAND) Order 2005. These constituencies have been in place since the General Election in 2005. Prior to 2005, there were 72 UK Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland.

The 'Parliamentary Voting System and Constituencies Act 2011' resulted in a UK-wide review of UK Parliamentary constituencies to be carried out between 2011 and 2013. This will lead to boundary changes in Scotland, and will reduce the number of constituencies from 59 to 52.

Scottish Parliamentary Constituencies

There are currently 73 Scottish Parliamentary constituencies. The First Periodic Review of Scottish Parliament Boundaries (available on the Boundary Commission for Scotland website at www.bcomm-scotland.gov.uk/1st_holyrood/1st_holyrood.asp) was implemented in time for the Scottish Parliament election in 2011. This review resulted in significant changes to many constituencies in terms of boundaries and names (although the number of constituencies remains 73), and therefore direct comparison over time will not be possible.

Local Government Wards

There are 353 electoral wards in Scotland. They are each fully contained within a single local council area. Electoral wards have been in place in their current form since 2006 following the recommendations of the Fourth Statutory Reviews of Electoral Arrangements: <http://www.lgbc-scotland.gov.uk/reports/eareports4th.asp>

Prior to this, there were 1,222 electoral wards in Scotland, so a very significant change to ward geography was made at this time, and any long term analysis of trends is not possible.

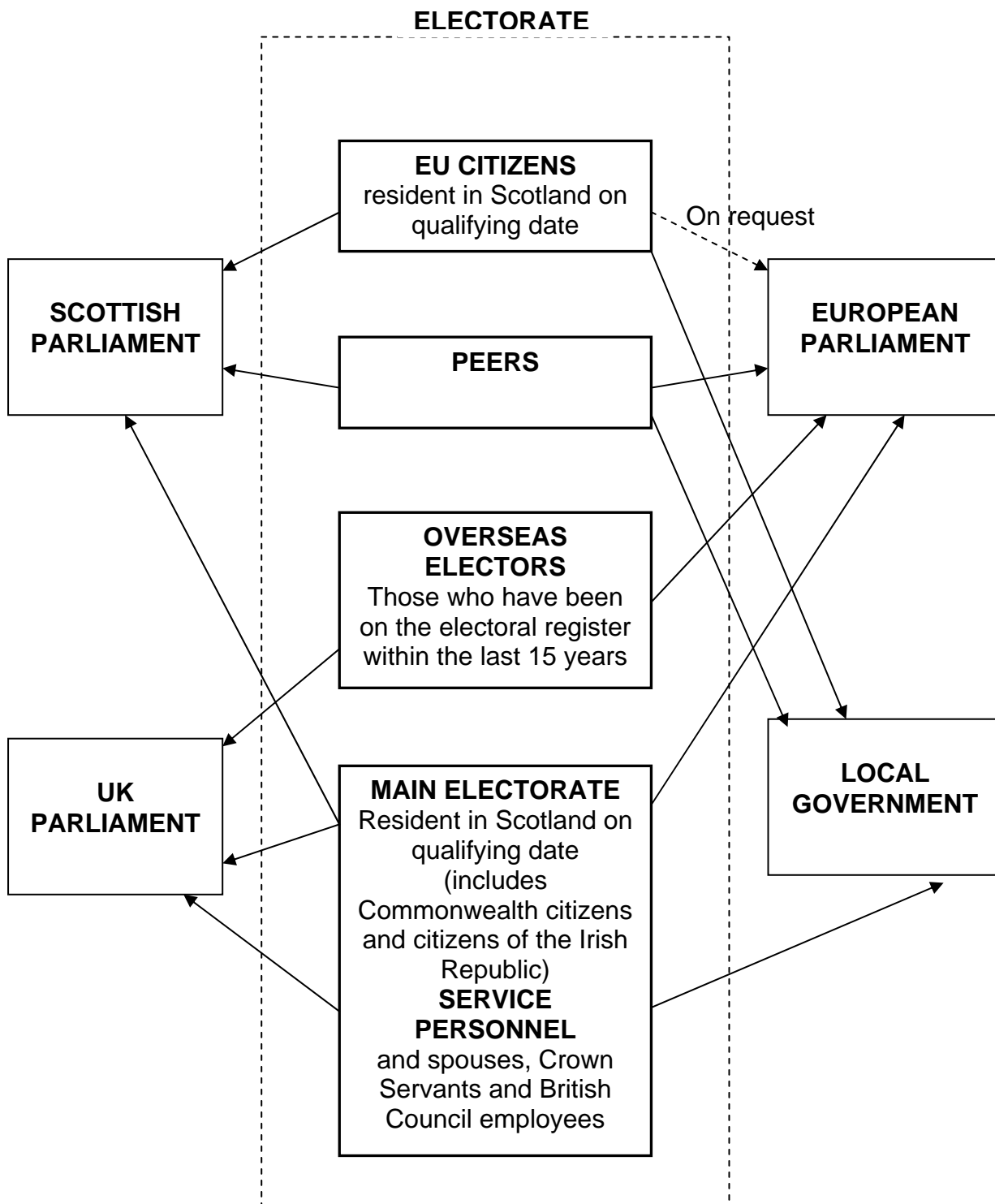
More detailed information about the Electoral system is available at the About My Vote website: www.aboutmyvote.co.uk/default.aspx

2. Interpreting and Using Electoral Statistics

Considerable care must be taken when using electoral statistics alongside population estimate data. The scope for direct comparison between these two sources is limited. Electoral geographies, eligibilities, registration processes and time references must be taken into account. Population estimates are produced on a different basis in all of these aspects. The following table summarises some of the key differences between population estimates and electoral statistics.

Electoral statistics	Population estimates
Geographies	
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • UK Parliament constituencies • Scottish Parliament constituencies • Electoral wards • Council areas 	<p>Geographies used for population estimates such as health boards and statistical data zones differ from electoral geographies. Population estimates for some electoral geographies are produced, but only on a 'best fit' basis, with the exception of Council areas which is therefore the only fully comparable geography that can be used.</p>
Coverage	
<p>Definition: Everyone eligible and registered to vote.</p> <p>Age: Aged 18 or older or due to attain 18 during the life of the register. No age information is held on the register for those aged 18 or over, but attainers are identified. A count of attainers alone is also published as part of the dataset. Coverage of attainers is known to be low in the Electoral Register.</p> <p>Residency: Length of residency is not defined in terms of precise duration. The register includes persons residing overseas who have the right to vote in the UK.</p> <p>Number of entries: In some cases there may be more than one entry for the same person on the register nationally. For example, students may be on the electoral register at their term time address as well as their parents' home address. In a similar way, person with second homes may appear on the electoral register twice.</p> <p>Voter eligibilities: Eligibilities for each type of election are complex. The Local Government and Scottish Parliament electorate is most comprehensive in terms of coverage and likely to be closest to the population estimate.</p>	<p>Everyone resident for 12 months or longer.</p> <p>All ages. Population estimates are provided by age, but any viable comparison with the electoral register can only be done for the totality of those aged 18 and over.</p> <p>Population estimates are based on everyone whose stay in the UK is 12 months or more. Students are considered resident at their term time address.</p> <p>The population estimates aim to count each person once.</p> <p>Population estimates cover everyone who meets the residency criterion irrespective of their citizenship status.</p>
Time reference	
<p>The electoral register is aimed to represent the eligible registered population continuously. There is likely to be a time lag between relevant events (such as house moves) and the corresponding register update. The annual canvass takes place during August / September and is based on a reference date of 15th October in order to produce a Register as at 1st December. This is potentially five months after the last population estimate (or seven months before the next population estimate).</p>	<p>Population estimates refer to population as at a point in time – 30th June of each year.</p>

Appendix 1, Diagram 1



Note that this diagram is slightly simplified – it does not include information on homeless, those with no permanent address and certain types of voluntary inpatients.