

VOTING REGISTRATION FAQs

Update 26 March 2024

WHY SHOULD I VOTE?

Q1. I'm British but I've lived abroad for some time. Why should I vote in UK elections?

A. Voting is a basic citizenship right and British citizens who move abroad don't have that many rights, so that's one reason to vote. But, if you need more reasons, perhaps you have elderly parents who need access to good health and social care in the UK? Or you are in a relationship with a non-British citizen and you may find it hard to meet the **minimum income requirement** and other immigration costs and conditions if you want to move back to the UK with them? Or children who want to go to university there? Or perhaps you are relying on the UK to pay part of your pension when you retire? If any of these apply to you, you might want to have a say in policies covering these areas. Ultimately, voting is not compulsory in the UK so you don't have to vote if you don't want to but the new rules mean that those who do want to vote can.

Q2. OK, you've convinced me. Who can vote under the new rules?

A. Any British citizen (this includes an Irish citizen who also qualifies for British citizenship, or citizens of Crown Dependencies), aged 18 and over who was previously registered **or lived in the UK**, even if that was only as a child. You no longer need to have been previously registered to vote before you left the UK.

Q3. Which elections can I vote in under this new legislation?

A. You can vote in any Parliamentary election. This includes general elections and by-elections. Referendums are also likely to be included as the franchise for the 2016 Brexit referendum was the same as for national elections. We still cannot vote in local elections and there are different rules for the Stormont, Senedd and Holyrood elections, in NI, Wales and Scotland.

REGISTERING TO VOTE

Q4. I left the UK in 1995 and I lived at several addresses - Barnsley, Birmingham and Blackpool - before I emigrated. Can I register at any one of them?

A. You must register in the last place you were registered to vote, even if this was not the last place that you lived. If you were never registered, you should register in your last place of residence before you emigrated. You will need to provide evidence to support this in your application and the Electoral Commission provides guidance to EROs on the **types of evidence** that they can accept. Constituency shopping won't be allowed.

Q5. When can I register to vote?

A. If you have lived outside the UK for more than 15 years or if you never registered to vote in the UK when you lived there, registration opens on 16 January 2024.

If you have lived outside the UK for less than 15 years and were previously on the electoral roll, you can already apply anytime.

Q6. Is there a deadline to register to vote?

A. There will be a cut-off date for registration to vote in the next Parliamentary elections but that will depend on the date set for polling day. Obviously, the earlier you register the better, in case of problems proving your identity or last place of registration or residence, and the sooner your voting pack will be sent out to you once an election is called.

Q7. How do I register to vote?

A. You will need to register to vote and make a declaration as an overseas elector at [gov.uk](https://www.gov.uk). If you are registering in England, Wales or Scotland this can be done online as currently, or by post or it may be possible by telephone. It will also be possible to apply for an absent vote – postal or proxy – online via separate application. The advice we have been given is to do this once you have been told by your ERO that you are or will be registered.

You will also be able to upload supporting documents.

If you live in Northern Ireland you need to download, print and complete a registration form. We will update these FAQs once we know if a telephone application may be possible

You will need to prove your identity and provide evidence of your last place of residence or where you were last registered to vote in the UK.

Q8. How do I prove my identity?

A. This should be fairly straightforward. If you can remember it, you can provide your National Insurance (NI) Number. If you've forgotten it, you can [try to find it online](#). The Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) will then check your NI number against information held about you by the Department of Work and Pensions (DWP) to confirm your identity. You will also need to give your date of birth.

The good news is that a new step has been added to the process for proving your ID and, if you cannot remember or find your NI number, you can provide a scan of your British passport (current or expired). Or, in the unlikely case that you don't have a current or expired passport, other documents proving ID (a list is set out in the secondary legislation). If you cannot provide evidence to satisfy the ERO that you are who you say you are, you could also in the last resort rely on the attestation option.

Q9. What is the attestation option?

A. You can ask someone who knows you to provide an attestation that you are who you say you are. **Please note:** There are very strict rules around the provision of an attestation, including that an attestor can only provide 2 attestations during a given period, and it is a **criminal offence** to make or submit a false attestation.

Q10. Who can provide an attestation?

A. You will need an attestor. An attestor must be over 18 and registered to vote in the UK. They cannot be a close family member such as a spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild of the person asking them to make an attestation. They can be resident in the UK or overseas. If they live in the UK, they must satisfy the ERO that they are of 'good standing in the community'. If they live abroad, they do not need to satisfy this condition.

Q11. I am a naturalised British citizen. Will this make a difference when I register as an overseas voter?

A. It shouldn't do but where an ERO has doubts as to whether you are a British citizen, they are entitled under the regulations to ask you for further evidence. This can include a birth certificate or a certificate of naturalisation.

Q12 (NEW). I was last registered or resident under a different name, will this be a problem?

A. It shouldn't be. You should apply under your current name. When you make the declaration, tell the ERO that you have changed your name and what your previous name(s) was, and provide the reason along with a copy of your UK passport (current or expired). The ERO will let you know if they need any further evidence from you to link you to your previous registration or address.

If you don't have a UK passport but you were born in the UK before 1 January 1983 state that; if you were born after 01.01.1983 you will need to state how you acquired British citizenship as well as the date, place and country of your birth.

Q13. I moved abroad over ten years ago and cannot remember if I was registered to vote. How do I prove this?

A. The Electoral Commission recommends that registrations on the electoral roll be kept by EROs for 15 years. Some do archive older registers either on site or at the main library. Otherwise, they are archived in county libraries and at the [British Library](#) and are harder to access. If you could last vote in 2008 or 2009, the register showing your registration should still be available but earlier registrations may not be. You won't be able to rely on the ERO to look for an old registration for you so if you don't have an electoral roll registration document move on to making sure you can prove your last residence in the constituency where you were registered instead.

Q14. How can I prove where I was last resident?

A. The new legislation contains a non-exhaustive [list of accepted documents](#) in section 26D p14 that you can upload to prove your last residence. Any document you provide as proof must contain your name (or a previous name if you have changed it) and the relevant address. The non-exhaustive list includes letters from the tax office such as a P45, a UK driving licence (current or expired), a council tax demand or letters about your pension or other benefits from the DWP, or from UK universities or schools.

Q15. I've moved around a lot since leaving the UK and don't have any of the documents on the list. Does that mean I cannot register?

A. Not necessarily. EROs also have discretion to accept other documents that could prove your last residence so ask them what other evidence they will accept. Failing that, in the last resort, you can also provide an attestation (see above in the identity section for details about attestors and attestations).

Q16. I was a child when I last lived in the UK, will I have to provide any additional proof of residence?

A. The ERO will ask you for the full name of a parent or guardian who was resident at your last address before you left the UK, any evidence that that parent or guardian was registered on the electoral roll, a copy of your birth certificate with the name of the relevant parent or a certificate proving that your guardian had been appointed as your guardian.

If you cannot provide any of this evidence, you could also try the attestation route (see above).

Q17 (NEW). How long do I have to have lived in the UK in order to be able to vote now if I was never registered to vote when I lived there?

A. There is no specific period of time. You will need to show that you are a British citizen, and have lived in the UK, but that you were never registered to vote: in this case, you can apply to register at the address where you last lived in the UK. The ERO will probably ask for evidence that you actually lived in the UK at that address, and, if you are not able to provide that, you may be asked to provide an attestation of this.

Q18. I want to register anonymously. Can I do this as an overseas elector?

Yes, you can but this cannot be done online. You will need to send an email to your local elections office. Follow the instructions when you register, or contact the ERO in your local council for more information.

Q19. How often will I have to renew my registration?

A. Electoral registration will now last until the third successive 1st November after which you registered. However, there will be transitional arrangements for the period following implementation of the Elections Act and overseas voters will need to pay attention to these. This means that e.g. someone who just renewed in September 2023 will not move to the new cycle until they renew by September 2024, and someone who registers in March 2024 will need to renew in November 2026 and not three years after they registered i.e. not in March 2027.

A light touch renewal declaration will be used for renewing your registration and should speed it up. You should be contacted by your ERO several months before you are due to renew your registration. Your proxy or postal vote registration will also need to be renewed at the same time.

Important: You will only need to renew your overseas registration every three years but if you are applying for an anonymous entry this will have to be renewed each year.

HOW OVERSEAS VOTERS CAN CAST THEIR VOTE

Q20. Great, I am registered, how can I cast my vote?

A. You can choose how to cast your vote when you register. You have three options:

- By post
- By proxy
- In-person

Q21. I can't decide which option to choose. What are the pros and cons of each one?

A. **If you vote by post** it is a cheap option and you get to put your cross on the ballot paper. Postage back to the UK should be free using the international business reply service, although check that this is accepted by the postal service in the country where you live. Unfortunately, there have been delays in past elections and ballot packs don't always arrive early enough for you to vote and post them back in time for your vote to count. If they do arrive before polling day but you are worried about the speed of the postal service, you can always use a courier service to speed up the process. You will however have to pay for this and your ballot paper still might not arrive before the polls close.

B. **If you vote by proxy** you avoid the potential delays in the ballot pack being sent to your address abroad but you have to nominate and trust someone else to fill in the voting form for you.

C. **If you vote in person** you get to vote at the polling station (you will need to show ID), you know you have voted for your choice of candidate and you know your vote will be counted. But it is obviously expensive and time consuming and if there is bad weather or a transport strike or you just fall ill at the last minute you might not make it to the polling station in time.

Q22. When can I apply for a postal vote or a proxy?

A. You can apply for a postal vote or proxy as soon as you are registered or told that you will be registered by your ERO. Don't forget this vital second step in the process!

Q23. Who can be a proxy?

A. They must be 18 years old, registered to vote, able to get to the polling station (or vote by postal proxy) and eligible to vote in the election.

Q24. I want to vote by proxy but I don't know anyone who is registered to vote. Can I still nominate them?

A. No, a proxy has to be registered on the electoral roll so now is a good time to send them the link to [register to vote](#) themselves.

Q25. My best friend Emma used to be my proxy but she has moved away from my constituency. Does this mean I have to vote by post or in person now?

A. No, you have two options: Either you can approach the local constituency office of the party you want to vote for and ask them to provide a proxy for you. Or you can stick with your best friend and ask for a combined proxy and postal vote through her. This sounds complicated but it is actually quite straightforward. If Emma now lives in Manchester but you are registered to vote in Motherwell, Emma can ask for a postal proxy vote to be posted to her in Manchester, she fills it in and then posts it back to Motherwell.

Q26. My brother has acted as our proxy for me and my partner in the past but our three adult kids now also live outside the UK and want to vote. Can my brother act as a proxy for all five of us?

A. No, he can't. The rules have changed and one person can only act as a proxy for a maximum of four overseas voters. One of you will have to find another proxy or vote by post or in person.

Q27. I have a friend in the UK who is an EU national and who is only registered to vote in local elections in England. Can they act as my proxy in a general or by-election?

A. No. Your proxy must be registered to vote in Parliamentary elections.

Q28. What happens if I choose the postal voting option but my voting papers don't arrive?

A. You can apply to switch from a postal to a proxy vote but this must be done at least 11 working days before polling day.

Example: The next general election date is set for Thursday 17 October. You registered as an overseas elector with a postal vote in February. Your ballot pack will be posted to you 19 working days before the election (20 September). If you have not received it by 1 October, your last day to switch to a proxy vote will be 2 October.

For more information, see the [Electoral Commission website](https://www.electoralcommission.gov.uk/)

If you run into issues, find help by emailing voting@britishineurope.org