

Grampian Assessor & Electoral Registration Officer



Equalities Mainstreaming Interim Report 2015

On behalf of Grampian Valuation Joint Board

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Introduction

This interim report should be read in conjunction with the Equalities Mainstreaming and Outcomes report published in April 2013.

The purpose of this report is to provide an update on our progress towards mainstreaming the equality duties into our employment and service provision activities with specific reference to the three equality outcomes that we identified in the 2013 report.

1. Progress in mainstreaming in the workplace

The workforce monitoring demonstrates that there has been little change in the overall balance of the workforce albeit that Assessor & ERO service has expanded in terms of full time equivalents in post as at 31 March 2015 in order to address the demands of delivering individual electoral registration.

During the last two years the service has accommodated an increase in the number of employee requests to move to part-time working in order to allow the workforce to meet their out-of-employment social and family responsibilities.

Further detail of the service's approach to address equality outcome 3 is provided below.

2. Progress in mainstreaming in our services

The Assessor and ERO service has had an extremely busy two year period of service re-design in order to meet the demands of the introduction of individual electoral registration and also the extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds, initially for the 2014 Scottish Independence Referendum, but now in anticipation of the permanent extension of the franchise to 16 and 17 year olds in relation to Scottish Parliamentary and local government elections. As at 31 March, the implementation of individual electoral registration is 6 months into a 20 month transition phase and the primary objective has been, and will continue to be, to ensure that the move to individual registration with the corresponding focus on individuals rather than households, does not mean that vulnerable individuals find themselves at a disadvantage.

3. Progress in mainstreaming towards our equality outcomes

Equality Outcome 1

Maximise the opportunities for young citizens to register to vote and therefore enable them to participate in the democratic process

The registration of young voters (under 18) for the referendum will mirror the demographic profile of Grampian. Registration statistics will demonstrate progress against census outputs and other sources of young person data. In turn, the early engagement with young citizens should prove beneficial in assisting to establish a culture of engagement in mid-late teens that may be maintained into adulthood.

Activities

- Consult with partner authorities and education providers
- Canvass and publicity plan
- Integration of the equalities element with the Electoral Commission performance standards regime
- Engagement with individual equalities groups to ensure removal of barriers to registration

Measurement

- Registration rates compared to census outputs
- Number of registration corrections and complaints

Progress to April 2015

2013 and 2014 have been momentous years for the democratic engagement of young people in the Grampian area. In September 2013 the service assisted Aberdeenshire Council to run a mock referendum on independence for 134,000 school pupils. Assistance was also made

available to Aberdeen City and the Moray Councils if they wished to run similar events.

The mock referendum was a major success and the household canvass that included voter registration forms for under 16s took place in the following month. Canvass return rates were high particularly as partnership working with Aberdeenshire, Moray and Aberdeen City education authorities ensured that the service had the most up-to-date data for the canvass and could ensure that young citizens had every opportunity to register to vote. Whilst the law did not require EROs to issue reminders for non-returned young voter registration forms, in Grampian a full reminder and follow-up procedure was undertaken to maximise registration rates amongst young people.

Registration and voter engagement activities were planned to follow the 2013 canvass and ran throughout the period January - August 2014 prior to the referendum on 18 September 2014. These activities included providing presentations, holding registration campaigns and manning stalls at engagement events run by Aberdeen City Youth Council, The Scottish Youth Parliament, local college and university Student Associations.

Specific work was conducted in partnership with the three local authorities to ensure that children in care, known as looked after children, had the opportunity to register to vote and were given the necessary guidance and assistance. The service also facilitated young voters with anonymous registration where personal safety, or that of another member of the household, was an issue.

Through engagement with young people the service identified a shortfall in registration knowledge amongst young people principally due to the time lag between the October 2013 canvass and the September 2014

referendum and the confidential nature of the statutory register of young voters. Many young people were not aware whether they were in fact registered to vote or not, and the service responded by issuing confirmation letters to all under 18s during June 2014 and linked that to a drive to register any young people who did not receive such letters.

In terms of measurement, as at 2 September 2014, the registration deadline for the independence referendum, 11,894 16 and 17 year olds had registered to vote in Grampian (Aberdeen, Aberdeenshire and Moray). An analysis of the 2011 census outputs, this being the most recent census, using age and country of birth data, suggests that this equates to 97% of the estimated number of 16 and 17 year olds resident in Grampian and eligible¹ to register to vote. Caution must be exercised when trying to estimate registration rates, as referenced in the Electoral Commission's report on the referendum². The 2011 census did not provide nationality data, so country of birth has been used as an indicator of nationality for estimating purposes. The time lag between the census and the referendum required data relevant to 13 and 14 year olds to be utilised on the assumption that there was no significant change in numbers of the 13/14yr old cohort between 2011 and 2014.

In terms of comparison to overall registration rates, the Electoral Commission's report into the referendum refers to a registration rate of 97%.

During the referendum, there were no formal complaints of clerical error corrections required in relation to the registration of 16 and 17 year olds.

¹ To be eligible to register to vote a young person must be born on or before 18 September 1996, be resident in Scotland and be a Commonwealth or EU citizen.

² Scottish Independence Referendum Report on the referendum held on 18 September 2014, The Electoral Commission, December 2014, pages 59-60

In this regard, and subject to the important caveats that apply to any estimate of registration rates, the outcome has been achieved.

At a national level the Assessor and ERO has given evidence to the Devolution (Further Powers) Committee on the extension of the franchise for the referendum and the Committee's plans for a permanent reduction of voting age in Scotland.

Post April 2015 priorities

The Scottish Elections (Reduction of Voting Age) Bill was published on 2 April 2015 and presents the exciting challenge of maintaining registers with data from 14 year olds upwards. This presents a real opportunity to integrate registration within the wider school curriculum and the service will be directing resources towards further collaboration with education authorities and other stakeholder groups ahead of the canvass that will take place during August 2015 and the Scottish Parliamentary elections that are scheduled for 5 May 2016.

Equality Outcome 2

Maximise registration amongst high mobility citizens such as occupiers of houses in multiple occupation and tenanted dwellings.

Research has shown that high mobility citizens and citizens in tenanted dwellings are under-represented in terms of electoral registration. Ethnicity and nationality may be influencing this under-registration.

Activities

- Consult with partner authorities and housing providers
- Canvass and publicity plan
- Integration of the equalities element with the Electoral Commission performance standards regime
- Engagement with individual equalities groups to ensure removal of barriers to registration
- Focus on improved materials using straightforward language tested by relevant groups in partnership with other EROs and the Electoral Commission.

Measurement

- Registration rates compared to census outputs
- Number of registration corrections and complaints

Progress to April 2015

To date the service has focussed on students, non-British EU citizens and the elderly who are in care establishments.

The challenge of mobility is present in all three cohorts and under-registration is a recognised issue.

Through the services' links with the three local authorities, people who change address and update their council tax payment details with the local authorities are also flagged to the service as potential electors. In the case of students in dedicated accommodation and care home residents, there is no corresponding finance related trigger. The service has built on its existing relations with student accommodation providers and care home managers who used to make the canvass returns providing details of all residents. Since the introduction of individual electoral registration on 19 September 2014 the responsibility to register lies with the individual rather than the 'householder' and the service has therefore adopted new approaches to the registration of students and care home residents.

Student registration promotion events have been held and the service worked with tertiary education providers in order to promote registration during the transition canvass that commenced in October 2014. Student email and website services carried registration information during this period. Data mining was also utilised to ensure that students received tailored invitations to register ahead of the 2015 general election that takes place on 7 May.

Care home residents required a more specific and individual approach due to the nature of individual electoral registration, which is focussed around online service provision and requires national insurance and date of birth information that those in care can find more difficult to access or utilise. The service introduced a dedicated care establishment transition canvass route that included explanatory letters to the care establishment managers and visits to care establishments by dedicated canvass personnel.

At a national level the Assessor and ERO has worked with the Care Inspectorate and the Electoral Commission to produce national guidelines and advice.

In relation to assisting non-British nationalities the service has focussed on the 19,000 non-British/Irish EU citizens in relation to enfranchisement. Prior to the European Parliamentary elections that took place on 22 May 2014 the service wrote to 14,518 EU citizens who had failed to declare their intention to participate in the elections on 22 May. Research suggests that EU citizens that are not British or Irish fail to appreciate that being registered as an elector is not sufficient to allow them to participate in European parliamentary elections. In 2014 they had to declare their intention to vote in Grampian for the elections held on 22 May by 6 May. This requirement to make a declaration is an issue that has been identified as a potential barrier to participation³. A further 2,994 declarations were made as a result of the re-designed form and explanatory letter. The overall declaration return rate achieved was therefore 39%. Whilst this appears to be a relatively low return rate, it must be compared to the overall turnout for this election of 35%. Set against this background, the level of engagement in Grampian achieved amongst this group of EU citizens was increased from 24% to 39%, and exceeded the UK national turnout figure of 35%.

Further quantitative measurement to determine progress towards this equality outcome in relation to the high mobility cohorts is difficult as the 2011 census outputs are by their very nature, a snapshot in time. The service intends to compare the 2015 canvass returns to the published register in order to seek to quantify progress.

³ The European Parliamentary elections May 2014 Report on the administration of the 22 May 2014 elections, The Electoral Commission, July 2014, pages 36-37

Post April 2015 Priorities

Quantitative analysis to determine progress will focus on the 2015 canvass.

The online functionality of individual electoral registration provides an ideal opportunity to integrate registration with online student enrolment or information systems and the service is working with tertiary education providers in order to integrate registration with these services for the commencement of the 2015/16 academic year.

With the care establishments now effectively transitioned to the new individual electoral registration framework, the focus of future developments in terms of this equality outcome will also be directed towards the tenanted housing sector in order to seek to integrate registration with lettings.

Equalities Outcome 3

To maximise opportunities for young people to enter the workforce

Youth employment is a key national priority, with the low percentage of employees recruited directly from school identified as a key issue. Whilst the service relies on a significant number of individuals who are required to have tertiary education and be working towards professional qualifications, analysis confirms that under 25 year olds are under-represented in the service's workforce. Notwithstanding that recruitment is fairly minimal, the opportunity nevertheless exists to enhance opportunities for young citizens.

Activities

- Promote work experience opportunities for under 25 year olds
- Review recruitment advertising media
- Promote career progression schemes to encourage young people to make the service an employer of choice.

Measurement

- Annual workforce monitoring
- Annual work-experience monitoring

Progress to April 2015

In June 2013 the Grampian Valuation Joint Board approved a career grade scheme for clerical officers. Prior to June, career grade schemes that promoted professional development had existing for trainee chartered surveyors and surveying technicians; there was no dedicated career grade scheme for employees working on the administrative rather than technical side of the organisation. The introduction of the clerical officer career grade scheme ensured that career development opportunities were

available across all three service strands of the organisation, valuation for rating, council tax assessment and electoral registration.

Recruitment advertising has been reviewed and the majority of opportunities are now advertised online.

Post April 2015 Priorities

Since 2013 the service has faced a period of intense activity in terms of electoral registration and take up of the career grade scheme has been disappointing. The service will therefore consult with employees.

Work experience continues to be made available to under 25s through our work with education authorities.

5. Conclusion

The Board has supported the Assessor & ERO in mainstreaming equalities throughout the service and monitoring progress in relation to the protected characteristics and the specific equality outcomes identified above.

Significant progress has been made towards achieving the specific equality outcomes identified in 2013. This progress must be viewed against a backdrop of the major demands placed on the service by the Scottish Independence Referendum and the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration, which at the same time have also provided excellent opportunities to mainstream equality duties.

6. Appendix: Workforce Monitoring Statistics for year to 31.3.2015

	Work force Profile*	Employment Applicants	Appointment	Training	Promotion	Leavers
Total number	84	70	17	37	4	6
Race						
White						
British	98%	50%	35%	97%	100%	100%
Other		7%				
Irish		2%				
Other white background	1%	2%				
Mixed						
Asian, Asian Scottish, Asian English, Asian Welsh or other British Asian						
Indian		2%				
Pakistani						
Bangladeshi						
Chinese	1%			3%		
Other Asian background		2%				
Black, Black Scottish, Black English, Black Welsh or other Black British		4%				
Other ethnic background						
Unidentified		31%	65%			
Disability						
Yes	1%	4%				
No	99%	96%	100%	100%	100%	100%
Gender						
Female	52%	59%	77%	62%		33%
Male	48%	41%	23%	38%	100%	67%
Age						
16-25	1	5		1		
26-35	9			4	1	1
36-45	13	3		4	1	
46-55	29	4	1	19		
56-65	22	1	1	9	2	2
>65	1	4				3
Unknown						

*As at 31 March 2015