

# THE ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND

Chief Electoral Officer: Douglas Bain CBE TD Advocate

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24 June 2009

## NEW RULES ON LATE REGISTRATION AND ABSENT VOTING HELPED EURO VOTERS

New provisions governing late registration allowed almost 12,000 changes to the electoral register prior to the 2009 European Parliamentary Election. The changes contributed to an increase of over 69,000 in the electorate compared to the 2004 election.

Douglas Bain, Chief Electoral Officer announced the figures during a post-election seminar hosted by the Electoral Commission where delegates also heard that the number of permanent absent voters increased by over 7% while there was a reduction of 76% in one-off absent votes.

During the scrutiny of absent vote applications 15 cases of suspected forgery were identified including three cases where doctors' signatures appear to have been forged. All these cases are being passed to the PSNI and a number of other cases are still being considered.

Douglas Bain said: **'The new rules resulted in a significant increase in the number of people entitled to vote and I will continue to look at ways to build on this success.'**

**'My office is committed to ensuring that everyone legally entitled to be included on the electoral register and to vote is given every opportunity to do so but I will not hesitate to take appropriate action where any attempts are made to cheat the system.'**

Anyone who needs any information about Electoral Registration can contact the EONI Helpline on 0800 4320 712 (Textphone 0800 3284 502) or visit [www.eoni.org.uk](http://www.eoni.org.uk)

### Notes to Editor

Under an amendment made to the Representation of the People Act 1983 individuals could apply to register or to change the details of their current registration until 19 May compared with 7 April under the previous law.

A number of proposed changes to electoral law, which it is hoped could be in place before the next general Election, were also outlined. These included provisions to make it easier for those aged over 65 years and in receipt of attendance allowance to apply for

an absent vote and the use of EU national identity cards and driving licences at polling stations to prove identity.

Douglas Bain also confirmed his intention to count the votes at the General election overnight with the results being available in the early hours of the morning after polling day.

'Absent voting' is the term used to cover both postal and proxy voting. An elector may be granted an absent vote either for an indefinite period (permanent vote) or for a particular election (one-off vote).