

ELECTORAL OFFICE FOR NORTHERN IRELAND



The Rt Hon Hilary Benn MP
Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
1 Horse Guards Road
LONDON
SW1A 2HQ

15 April 2025

Dear Secretary of State,

Under section 10ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983 I am obliged to write to you on or before 15 April each year advising you about the need for an Electoral Canvass for Northern Ireland.

My recommendation is **not** to hold an Electoral Canvass in Northern Ireland in 2025. Below I have outlined the reasons for my recommendation.

Firstly, the [Electoral Commission's report on the 2022 Electoral Register in Northern Ireland](#) stated:

"The level of completeness of Northern Ireland registers has increased substantially since 2018. Both the local government and parliamentary registers have improved by 10 percentage points, standing at 83% complete and 84% complete respectively."

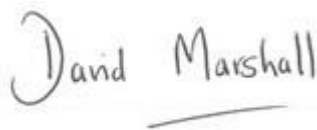
Secondly, last year (2024/25) had the largest number of electoral registrations outside an Electoral Canvass in Northern Ireland (over 120,000) – this figure is a 10% increase from 2023/24. The weekly registration figures in Figure 1 (attached) show that this level of activity was driven by the 2024 UK General Election and data driven initiatives targeting young electors and recent movers. I am convinced that the use of public sector data to target registration limits the level of degradation of the Electoral Register.

Thirdly, I would caution that while improvements are being made, the current Electoral Canvass and registration policy cannot easily capture all population movement. Therefore, there remains the need for additional investment and/or changes in policy to ensure the Electoral Register is kept up to date.

As an example, the current Electoral Canvass law in Northern Ireland requires that I remove all electors from the Electoral Register prior to the Electoral Canvass. The Electoral Office must then contact and receive a Canvass response from all eligible electors to re-register. This is the case even if the electors were registered just before the Canvass and the public sector data indicates that their details have not changed. In short, the current once a decade Electoral Canvass coupled with the current registration legislation is not effective in maintaining an annually accurate and complete Electoral Register.

I would ask that the Government prioritise reform well in advance of the next statutory Electoral Canvass deadline of 2030. This view is also held by the Electoral Commission, as outlined in their [report on the Northern Ireland electoral registration Canvass 2021](#) and was also the view of my predecessor. Given this and the need for clearer operational-led proposals, I would intend to document in next year's advisory letter what a reformed Electoral Canvass and registration policy could look like.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive style with a horizontal line underneath the name.

Dr David Marshall

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

Figure 1. Weekly Electoral Registrations Northern Ireland - 2024-25

