

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 2026

Dear Secretary of State,

Under section 10ZA of the Representation of the People Act 1983 I am obliged to write to you 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 2026. Below I have outlined the reasons for my recommendation.

Firstly, whilst the timeline for this work was four years ago, 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."

This provides a baseline level of assurance.

Secondly, last year (2025/26) the Electoral Office received 90,000 electoral registrations. The weekly registration figures for 2025/26 are shown in Figure 1 (attached). This shows that a significant part of the registration activity in 2025/26 followed data driven initiatives targeting young electors and recent movers. This demonstrates that the use of public sector data to target registration helps limit the level of degradation of the Electoral Register.

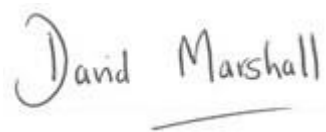
In addition, last year there were no elections held. In 2024/25 there were 120,000 registrations, in 2023/24 102,000 registrations and in 2022/23 84,000 registrations. These three years all included an election. Given the number of registrations in 2025/26 mirrored these years, this demonstrates using public sector data to target registration

helps limit the level of degradation of the Electoral Register and acts to avoid the need for an Electoral Canvass.

Thirdly, as I have noted previously our current Electoral Canvass law has an inherent flaw. Therefore I cannot ever advise running a Canvass using this approach. However I note the Government intends, as part of the Representation of the People Bill 2026, to change the current law to enable automatic voter registration & new Northern Ireland Canvass processes. This is most welcome and the new law has the capacity to transform electoral registration if written and implemented well. In this context last year I indicated I would write to you on what an improved Electoral Canvass and registration law could look like. I will set this out in a separate paper which I intend to send to you after the Great Britain Elections on 7 May 2026.

I am happy to discuss this letter with you or engage with your officials on any issues you feel require consideration.

Yours sincerely,

A handwritten signature in dark ink that reads "David Marshall". The signature is written in a cursive style, with the first name "David" and the last name "Marshall" clearly legible. There is a small horizontal line under the last name.

Dr David Marshall

Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland

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Electoral Registration Applications by Week 2025/26

