

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds): To ask the honourable Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what estimate he has made of the total number of potential overseas nationals who are entitled to register for an overseas vote; and how many such people were registered to vote in the (a) 2005 and (b) 2010 General Elections. [164629]

Reply

The Electoral Commission informs me that it has made no estimate of the total number of overseas nationals who are eligible to register to vote in elections in the United Kingdom. The dispersed nature of, and lack of data on, this potential electorate makes it very difficult to conduct surveys on this issue.

There have, however, been two relatively recent estimates of the total number of UK citizens living abroad that the Commission refers to when planning its work on overseas voters. One by the Institute for Public Policy Research, in 2006, put the number at 5.5 million and one by the World Bank, in 2010, estimated

it to be 4.7 million¹. Neither estimate takes eligibility, based on either age or the 15-year rule, into account.

Figures on the number of registered overseas electors are available only for December each year, when the new registers are published. The number of overseas voters before and after the last two General Elections was:

- December 2004: 9,672
- December 2005: 18,947
- December 2009: 14,901
- December 2010: 32,739

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds):To ask the honourable Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what recommendations the Electoral Commission has made to the Government to make it easier for overseas voters to register. [164632]

Reply

The Electoral Commission has recommended that the Government takes appropriate steps to ensure that eligible British citizens living overseas are able to

¹ The World bank, Migration and Remittances Factbook 2011.
<http://siteresources.worldbank.org/INTLAC/Resources/Factbook2011-Ebook.pdf>

register online from the point at which the individual electoral registration digital service goes live, which is currently planned for summer 2014.

The Commission has also recommended that all Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain should be required to offer this method of registration, and that the service should not be provided at their discretion. The Commission will issue guidance to support Electoral Registration Officers and their staff in implementing any changes.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds):To ask the honourable Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what recommendations the Electoral Commission has carried out into different overseas voting systems around the world; and what conclusions have been drawn that would be applicable to the UK. [164633]

Reply

The Electoral Commission has informed me that it has not carried out detailed work in this area nor made any specific recommendations for change. The

Commission has, however, recommended changes to the current rules that will help overseas voters, including extending the timetable for elections in order to allow overseas voters more time to vote by post. This change is expected to come into effect for elections from 2014 onwards.

The Commission is aware that some other countries offer different solutions to help overseas electors participate in elections and believes a choice of voting methods is important. Any proposals to change the voting methods available to overseas electors would need to be carefully assessed before they are introduced, including to make sure that they are secure and cost effective. This assessment would include any relevant evidence available from other comparable democracies.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds): To ask the hon. Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, how many overseas nationals are entitled to register to vote according to their current country of residence
[164634]

Reply

The Electoral Commission has informed me that it does not hold information on the number of overseas nationals entitled to register to vote according to their current country of residence.

The total number of UK citizens registered as overseas voters at 1 December 2012 was 19,245.

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds): To ask the honourable Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what target the Electoral Commission has to increase the number of overseas voters (a) registered and (b) voting in the next general election. [164630]

Geoffrey Clifton-Brown (The Cotswolds): To ask the honourable Member for South West Devon, representing the Speaker's Committee on the Electoral Commission, what steps the Electoral Commission is taking to increase awareness of overseas electors of their entitlement to vote before the next election; and how such steps will differ from previous elections. [164631]

Reply

The Electoral Commission informs me that it does not set specific targets regarding the number of voters overseas that are either registered or use their vote. The Commission will, however, deliver a public awareness campaign to encourage British citizens living overseas to register to vote ahead of the European Parliamentary elections in 2014 and the UK Parliamentary election in 2015. The Commission's campaigns will be informed by evidence obtained from its most recent overseas voter campaign, which took place during the 2011 UK wide referendum on the parliamentary voting system, and the latest insights into communication techniques since then, particularly new ways to reach people to online.

The Commission's campaigns are expected to focus on the ten countries with the largest expatriate populations (determined by the latest ONS data) and will include activity on specific websites accessed by overseas, such as BBC.com and editorial coverage in newspapers and on radio stations with a large expatriate audience.

In addition, the Commission is working with overseas representatives from each of the political parties to identify practical ways to reach overseas electors. It has also commenced discussions with the Foreign and Commonwealth Office to ensure they provide the support of consulates and embassies, particularly in regions with large expatriate communities.