



HM Government

Sir Mark Sedwill KCMG
Cabinet Secretary
Cabinet Office
70 Whitehall
London
SW1A 2AS

Ms Layla Moran MP
MP for Oxford West and Abingdon
House of Commons
London
SW1A 0AA

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EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

Thank you to you and your colleagues for your letter of 7 June regarding the recent European Parliamentary elections.

The right to vote is fundamental to our democracy and I would like to reassure you that we carry out our duties in respect of elections with this very firmly in mind. The Government took all of the legal and financial steps necessary to facilitate the European Parliamentary elections and to enable Returning Officers to prepare for the polls on 23 May. We worked with Returning Officers, the Electoral Commission and other agencies such as the Society of Local Authority Chief Executives (SOLACE) and the Association of Electoral Administrators (AEA) to support the smooth running of the polls.

You raise two specific concerns in respect of these elections: the registration requirements for non-UK EU citizens and the operation of postal votes.

In order to fulfill our obligations under EU law, non-UK EU citizens in the UK need to complete a UC1 form to vote in European Parliamentary elections. EU Council Directive 93/109/EC requires all Member States to send the details of any EU citizens' declarations to the state they are a citizen of "sufficiently in advance of polling day" to ensure an EU citizen does not vote twice in the same European Parliamentary election.

Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) are under a statutory duty to take the necessary steps to encourage participation by electors in the electoral process in the area in which they act. For the recent European Parliamentary elections that included making sure citizens of the EU who are resident in the UK and registered to vote in local elections were made aware they needed to complete


the UC1 form in order to enable them to vote. The Electoral Commission supported EROs in the discharge of this function and encouraged them to take additional steps to raise awareness of this requirement locally, through social media channels and other means. The UC1 form was accessible on the websites of the Electoral Commission, local authorities and Your Vote Matters.

Following the 2016 referendum the Government decided not to take forward any changes to the registration process for European Parliament elections as its focus was to implement the result of the referendum and to leave the EU. The process, therefore, has remained the same as in previous years. The requirement to complete a UC1 form is not new and has been in place in the UK since the 2004 European Parliamentary elections. Similar provisions apply to UK citizens living in other EU Member States.

Turning to your concerns about postal votes for overseas electors, the Government recognises the importance of smooth and timely process for overseas electors. We have already amended the timetable for UK elections, including for European Parliamentary elections, to maximise the time available for postal vote packs to be printed, posted and returned. This action was taken to ensure sufficient time in the election timetable for postal ballot papers to be sent out and returned by overseas voters in time to be counted on polling day.

UK agencies, including the Electoral Commission, always advise that postal votes for overseas electors need to go out as soon as possible. That said, the Returning Officer for the electoral area has independent responsibility for arranging, with their suppliers, the timing for postal votes to be printed and to be dispatched within the statutory timetable. In addition, the register to vote website was updated in 2016 to encourage overseas voters living in more remote parts of the world, or anywhere where the local postal service may be less reliable, to consider appointing a proxy in the UK to cast their vote on their behalf. We will continue to work with the Electoral Commission, the Association of Electoral Administrators and other relevant stakeholders to improve the voting process for overseas electors.

As with any election, we will reflect on proceedings and outcomes. In line with their statutory duty, the Electoral Commission will be publishing a report into the administration of the polls later this year, which the Government will consider in due course.

Yours sincerely,

MARK SEDWILL