

## Getting our Congregation Election-ready!

**Practical Ways for Churches to help their congregations get registered and ready for the General Election.**

**Set up a Ballot Box in your church before the 18 June to hold an ‘Election Ready Sunday’ and get accredited as a “Voter Registration Champion”**

“Election Ready Sunday” is a simple activity to do in the next few weeks in June. It could make a big difference to members of your congregation by ensuring they are registered and have the right ID to vote, now that photo ID is compulsory in a General Election. Through Election Ready Sunday we aim to reach some of the 300,000 people who have the right to vote but are not yet registered – some of these people will be in our congregations.

**You need to do this before 18 June** (so Sunday 2<sup>nd</sup>, 9<sup>th</sup> or 16<sup>th</sup>), so you are ahead of the deadline for electoral registration. In general, the sooner the better!

### **Why is this important?**

Emma Jackson, convener of the Public Life and Social Justice Group of the Church of Scotland says;

*“At its heart, politics is all about improving the structures and systems of our society...That is something that we should all benefit from, that our neighbour should benefit from – our neighbour who might be in more complex or more challenging circumstances than those we find ourselves in”*

### **Election Ready Sunday involves:**

- Setting up a “ballot box” (not a real one!) in your church
- Telling everyone present at the service about registration and voter ID, and about the 300,000 people who still need to register
- Giving everyone a Voter Registration Champion leaflet – see below for a template leaflet – (not an official document!)
- Asking everyone to fill these in and put the filled in form into the “ballot box”
- Register your church on line as a Voter Registration Champion and you will be part of this national push to ensure everyone who has the right to vote can do so. See below for more details.
- Keep a record of the number of people who participate so you can provide your figures as part of the national Voter Registration Champion campaign.

### **What resources will you need:**

- One box with a hole in the top to serve as the ballot box;
- Printed Voter Registration Champion leaflets for each attendee [template below];

- A laptop, tablet or smartphone with internet connection to enable people to register to vote after the service at: [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) , and to register for a postal or proxy vote if needed. This takes a few minutes – see no 2 in Frequently Asked Questions below for how to help someone to register online.
- A stack of paper Voter Registration forms for people who may not want to register online: <https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-to-vote-if-youre-living-in-the-uk>
- Pens.

### **What will you need to do?**

You will need to engage the whole congregation on at least one Sunday, and ask each person present to verify that they are either:

- already registered to vote;
- pledged to register to vote ahead of the deadline; - or re-register if they're not sure
- ineligible to vote, or otherwise have a good reason not to register.

At an appropriate point in the service, an announcement needs to be made that the church is seeking to become an accredited Voter Registration Champion, and that to do so you need to make sure the congregation is election-ready! This means making sure that everyone within the congregation who can is registered to vote ahead of the deadline, that everyone knows about the photo ID they'll need to take to the ballot box, and that everyone is encouraged to turn out to vote on polling day.

At this point you can run through the information on the Voter Registration Champion leaflet (see below) that each member of the congregation will have.

You need to ask each member of the congregation to complete the 'tear off' section of the leaflet and put it in the ballot box. Explain that the aim is to get 100% of people present to complete the form – even if they are not able to vote. The idea is to do this as a whole-congregation activity – you can use your own judgement about the degree to which you include children in the activity.

At the conclusion of the announcement, you could either have people get up and 'vote' by putting their form in the ballot box, have a child circulate with the box, or catch people as they leave.

At the end you need to tally your forms, compare it to the number of people in the congregation that day, and check that you have hit the 90% threshold. Remember to keep a record of your numbers to help us measure the impact!

As soon as you have a plan in place to run an 'Election Ready Sunday' you can then accredit as a Voter Registration Champion via the website: [www.voterchampion.org.uk](http://www.voterchampion.org.uk). For more information or support check the website or contact [voterchampion@citizensuk.org](mailto:voterchampion@citizensuk.org).

## Frequently Asked Questions

### 1. The Voter Registration Champion Scheme

#### **What is the Voter Registration Champion scheme?**

The Voter Registration Champion scheme is a ground-breaking non-partisan accreditation scheme from Citizens UK that offers a Voter Registration Champion badge to organisations that take simple steps to ensure their members can participate in democracy. The Voter Registration Champions scheme recognises faith and community organisations, schools and colleges, higher education institutions and employers that help to get their people 'election-ready' by ensuring they are registered to vote, are educated about the new photo ID requirements, and are encouraged to turnout to vote. Citizens UK and partner organisations are aiming to ensure 300,000 at-risk voters are equipped to participate in the upcoming general election. You can find more information here: [www.voterchampion.org.uk/](http://www.voterchampion.org.uk/).

#### **Why is the Church of Scotland encouraging its congregations to accredit as Voter Registration Champions?**

The Church of Scotland is an Ambassador for the Voter Registration Champion scheme because it sees participating in the democratic process as an important civic responsibility, and because it has a particular concern to ensure the inclusion of exactly the groups in society that are most likely to be 'at-risk' of not being registered. According to Electoral Commission research, you are at greater risk of not being able to participate in the democratic process if you are: young, a non-UK national, rent your home, have moved recently, live in an economically-disadvantaged community, or are from an ethnic minority. With its presence in every community and commitment to the whole parish beyond the congregation, the Church of Scotland is uniquely placed to serve people by making sure they are registered to vote.

Emma Jackson, convener of the Public Life and Social Justice Group of the Church of Scotland, encourages all of us to consider the importance of voting, not only for ourselves but for our neighbours too, she says;

*"At its heart, politics is all about improving the structures and systems of our society...That is something that we should all benefit from, that our neighbour should benefit from – our neighbour who might be in more complex or more challenging circumstances than those we find ourselves in"*

*"In a just and compassionate society, exercising our right to vote is one of the key ways in which we can not only participate in democracy, but demonstrate our love for our neighbour as we engage in the issues that affect us all and we seek to hold our leaders to account."*

*The Church of Scotland is uniquely placed in communities all around Scotland and is delighted to be working with Citizens UK and others as we help encourage and facilitate voter registration and participation in elections."*

#### **Why are you asking us to verify that people are registered?**

Simply making people aware of the need to register to vote is not working – 8 million people who are eligible to vote are missing from electoral registers across the UK. The Electoral Commission and local councils are doing their best, but they do not have the resources or the reach to fill the gap. That's why civil society organisations, including churches, and employers are being asked to step up, engage their members, and verify that each person has made an active declaration that they are either already registered to vote, will register to vote ahead of the deadline, or are ineligible or have a good reason not to register. They will then be 'election-ready'.

We do not need any names or personal data, and we don't need you to collect any either – we just need a person of authority in each Voter Registration Champion organisation to tell us how many people have been verified as

‘election ready’ in the way described above. By tracking the numbers we can see the progress we are making towards our target of registering 300,000 at-risk voters.

### **What do we need to do to accredit as a Voter Registration Champion?**

The exact criteria for the Voter Registration Champion scheme varies by type of organisation. You can apply for accreditation as a Voter Registration Champion as soon as you have a plan to meet the criteria – you don’t have to wait until you have done it all. You can find information about accreditation on the website:

[www.voterchampion.org.uk](http://www.voterchampion.org.uk). For Faith and Community Organisations the criteria is:

- VOTER REGISTRATION: Run an annual Voter Registration campaign that aims to ensure that 100% of your organisation’s eligible membership are registered (or have actively chosen not to do so) before the deadline (with a 90% success rate);
- VOTER ID: Educate your members about the Voter ID requirements, and make sure they have the photo ID they need in order to vote before the deadline;
- VOTER TURNOUT: Remind your members about the election date, and encourage them to use their vote.
- VOTER REGISTRATION MONTH (SEPTEMBER 2024): Help build the movement by participating in Voter Registration Month activities.

## **2. Registering to Vote**

### **Why do we need to help people register to vote?**

The Electoral Commission estimates that there are 8 million people eligible to vote who risk being excluded because they are not registered to vote. Many ‘at-risk’ voters will be in our congregations and communities.

### **How do I check if I am registered to vote?**

There is no simple way to check if you are registered to vote – and if you have moved recently there is a significant chance that you are not registered. The advice is: **If in doubt, register to vote!** If you have already registered it is not a problem if you re-register – you will only be allowed to vote once!

### **How do we help people register to vote?**

It is very easy to register to vote. It takes 5 minutes, and you just need to know your name, address, date of birth, nationality, and your National Insurance number (though this is not compulsory, so don’t worry if you can’t find your NI number). You can register online [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) or by completing this paper form and sending it to the Electoral Registration Office at your local council:

<https://www.gov.uk/government/publications/register-to-vote-if-youre-living-in-the-uk> (there’s a link in the form that will help you find the address to send it to). **The deadline to register to vote is 11.59pm on the 18<sup>th</sup> June 2024**

### **How do we know who is eligible to register to vote?**

You can register to vote if you are resident (usually live) in Scotland and are aged 14 years and over, but you will only be able to vote in an election once you have turned 16, or 18, depending on the rules for the election.

**The minimum voting age for a UK Parliament Election is 18 years. This is higher than the voting age for Scottish Parliament and Scottish Local Elections, which is 16 years**

You must also be either a British, Irish or European Union citizen, **or** a Commonwealth citizen who has leave to enter or remain in the UK or who does not require such leave. This might seem complicated, so Citizens UK have created a website to help people of different nationalities work out if they are eligible to vote, just by putting in their nationality: <https://canivote.org.uk/>.

The Electoral Commission also has a good information page: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/who-can-vote](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/who-can-vote).

This differs from Scottish Parliament Elections and Scottish Local Elections, where all foreign nationals with leave to remain, including all those granted refugee status, are able to vote.

### **What about people who want to keep their address a secret, are abroad, or have no fixed abode?**

It is possible for people to register themselves to vote anonymously if having their name and address on the electoral register could affect their safety, or the safety of someone in their household:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/who-can-vote/register-vote/register-vote-anonymously>.

There is an array of guidance for people who might otherwise struggle to register to vote (armed services, people experiencing homelessness, Gypsy or Traveller community etc) on the Electoral Commission's website:

<https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/who-can-vote/other-registration-options>

## **3. Voter ID**

### **What are the new rules around Voter ID?**

The rules have changed for the general election – if you don't take photo ID to the polling station you won't be able to vote. More information here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/voter-id>

### **What forms of photo ID can I use for the election?**

You can check whether you have the right ID here: [www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need](http://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need). The photo on your ID must look like you. You can still use your ID even if it has expired.

Here is the full list of accepted ID: a UK or Northern Ireland photocard driving licence (full or provisional); a driving licence issued by an EU country, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein, the Isle of Man or any of the Channel Islands; a UK passport; a passport issued by an EU country, Norway, Iceland, Liechtenstein or a Commonwealth country; a PASS card (National Proof of Age Standards Scheme); a Blue Badge; a biometric residence permit (BRP); a Defence Identity Card (MOD form 90); a national identity card issued by the EU, Norway, Iceland or Liechtenstein; a Northern Ireland Electoral Identity Card; a Voter Authority Certificate; an Anonymous Elector's Document.

You can also use one of the following travel passes as photo ID when you vote: an older person's bus pass; a disabled person's bus pass; an Oyster 60+ card; a Freedom Pass; a Scottish National Entitlement Card (NEC); a 60 and Over Welsh Concessionary Travel Card; a Disabled Person's Welsh Concessionary Travel Card; a Northern Ireland concessionary travel pass.

### **What if I don't have an accepted form of photo ID?**

If you don't have one of the forms of photo ID listed above then you can apply for a free Voter Authority Certificate from your local council. There will be a deadline to apply, normally a few weeks before the election day itself. **You can apply for free photo ID** from your council here: <https://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate>. You'll need a recent, digital photo of yourself and your National Insurance number (you can still apply if you do not have a National Insurance number. You'll need to provide other documents to prove your identity, for example a birth certificate, bank statement and utility bill). **You must do this by 5pm on Wednesday 26 June.**

## 4. Voter Turnout

### How do I vote?

If you have registered to vote then your local council will send you a poll card in the post a few weeks before the election. You will need to go to the polling station allocated to you based on your address on the electoral register – this will be on your poll card. Before you go to vote, check where your polling station is. It might not be the closest one to where you live, and it might have changed since the last time you voted. **You have to go to your allocated polling station, and you can't go to a different one close to where you work, for example.** If you are unsure about your allocated polling station, you can use the tool on this page of the Electoral Commission's website for the fortnight ahead of the election: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/ways-vote/voting-person>. Polling stations will open at 07:00 and close at 22:00 on Thursday 4 July. You don't need to take your poll card to vote, but **don't forget to take your photo ID!** Once at the polling station the staff there will give you your ballot paper so that you can cast your vote.

### What about if I can't get to the polling station on election day?

If you cannot get to the polling station on election day then you can apply for a postal vote (you'll be sent your ballot paper in advance and asked to return it by post ahead of the election) or you can apply for a proxy vote (where a trusted person votes in person on your behalf). You can find information about applying for a postal vote here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/i-am-a/voter/apply-vote-post>. You can find information about applying for a proxy vote here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/ways-vote/apply-vote-proxy>.

**The deadline for applying for a postal vote is 5pm, on Wednesday 19 June**

(If you will be away from mid-June, you may miss your postal vote voter pack, so register for a proxy.)

**The deadline for applying for a proxy vote is 5pm on Wednesday 26 June**

### What if I have applied to vote anonymously to preserve my safety?

A different process applies for those who have registered to vote anonymously. Guidance here: <https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/voting-and-elections/ways-vote/how-vote-anonymously>.

## 1. VOTER REGISTRATION

If you are not registered to vote, you won't be able to vote at the next general election.

We are working with Citizens UK's Voter Registration Champions scheme to make sure that 300,000 eligible voters don't lose their right to vote because they aren't registered.

It is easy to register to vote - there's a simple online form or you can fill in a paper version and send it to your council.

**Register now:** [www.gov.uk/register-to-vote](http://www.gov.uk/register-to-vote)

## 2. VOTER ID

The rules are changing for the general election - if you don't take photo ID to the polling station you won't be able to vote.

Check whether you have the right ID here:

[www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need](http://www.gov.uk/how-to-vote/photo-id-youll-need)

Not everyone will have the right ID. You can apply for a free photo ID document from your local council by 26 June by going to

[www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate](http://www.gov.uk/apply-for-photo-id-voter-authority-certificate)

## 3. VOTER TURNOUT

Voting is the cornerstone of our democracy. If people don't vote they won't get a say on who gets to make decisions that affect their lives. **Election day is THURSDAY 4 JULY** - why not make a note now in your diary and work out where your local polling station is (it will be near home), and how you'll find time to vote that day (polling stations open from 07:00-22:00).

Election day falls in the school holidays for many parts of Scotland - if you are away or can't make it to vote in person you can apply for a postal vote (deadline 19 June) or proxy vote (deadline 26 June).

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-postal-vote>

<https://www.gov.uk/apply-proxy-vote>

I am certain that I am already registered to vote in the place I want to vote.

X

I am not registered to vote but I will register in time for the election.

X

I am not eligible to vote or have another good reason not to register.

X

Put an 'X' in the box that applies to you. Please tear off this section and put it in the ballot box.