

The Electoral Commission

Information on registering as a Political Party

Electoral Commission, March 2002

Introduction

The Electoral Commission was established by the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA) 2000, on 30 November 2000. Under the PERA, candidates at elections to the Westminster, Scottish and European Parliaments, the National Assembly for Wales, the Northern Ireland Assembly and local government (excluding parish and community level elections in England and Wales) can only stand under the description of a registered political party, as an 'independent', or on a blank ballot.

You may wish to note that the requirement to register a group name or description extends only to the wording to be used on a ballot paper: the Commission does not regulate the descriptions that parties and candidates use on their electoral material and advertising. There is no requirement for candidates that wish to describe themselves as 'independent', or stand on a blank ballot, to register.

The Commission maintains two registers of political parties that are eligible to field candidates at an election for any of the institutions listed above; one for Great Britain and one for Northern Ireland. Any group or organisation that wishes to field candidates under a group name or description at these elections must register with the Commission in order to do so

This guidance booklet aims to provide you with all the information that you will require should you seek to register with the Electoral Commission as a political party. Once you are ready to make an application to the Commission, you should select the relevant RP1 form and accompanying guidance on completing the form.

Other information

If you require any further information about registering as a political party, please contact:

Registrations and Compliance Team,
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
30 Great Peter Street
London
SW1P 2HW
Tel: 020 7271 0500
Fax: 020 7271 0505
Email: r&c@electoralcommission.org.uk
Web: www.electoralcommission.org.uk

In addition, further information about the requirements on registered political parties can be found in the Commission's guidance notes on:

Explanatory Notes on Donations to Political Parties
Explanatory Notes on Campaign Expenditure by Political Parties

Registering a Political Party

Requirements

In order to register as a political party, a party must submit the following information to the Electoral Commission:

- a fee of £150;
- a correctly completed RP1 application form;
- a copy of your party's constitution;
- a draft financial scheme.

Fee

The Electoral Commission is required by law to request a fee for registration, and the fee of £150 was set by the Secretary of State in January 2001. The Commission is therefore unable to allow a party to register on the Great Britain or Northern Ireland register of parties unless the £150 fee is paid in full.

The only other fee that registered parties will be required to pay to the Commission is an annual confirmation fee of £25, to be submitted when the party returns its annual accounts to the Commission.

Completing an RP1 application form

Registering in different parts of the UK

Before completing form RP1, prospective parties will need to decide which part(s) of the UK they would like to be registered in. A party can make one of four declarations specifying where in the UK they wish to be registered, and must select the correct version of form RP1 accordingly.

- [Registering in Great Britain alone](#)

A party can make a declaration that it is applying to be registered on the Great Britain register of parties. Parties that intend to make this declaration should register using form RP1GB.

- [Registering in Northern Ireland alone](#)

A party can make a declaration that it is applying to be registered on the Northern Ireland register of parties. Parties that intend to make this declaration should register using form RP1NI.

- [Registering in Great Britain and Northern Ireland](#)

A party can make a declaration that it is applying to be registered on both of the Great Britain and Northern Ireland registers of parties. Parties that intend to

make this declaration should register using form RP1UK, and should submit a separate constitution and financial scheme for the GB and NI sections of the party.

Parties that apply to register on both registers need only submit one fee. However, they must submit details (addresses, officers, emblem etc) for both the Northern Ireland and Great Britain parties at the same time. In addition, a confirmation fee will be payable for each party (currently £25 for each registration) when both the British and Northern Irish parties submit their annual accounts (see following sections on 'Financial Requirements of the PPERA – what they mean for new parties: Accounting Requirements').

- [Registering as a minor party in Great Britain alone](#)

A party can make a declaration that it is applying to be registered on the Great Britain register of parties as a minor party (see below for a definition). Parties that intend to make this declaration should register using form RP1M.

Registering in different parts of GB

Parties that choose to register on the Great Britain register must select whether they wish to register in each of England, Scotland and Wales. There is no requirement to be registered in each part of Great Britain, but a party will only be able to contest elections in the part(s) of Britain in which it is registered. In addition, a party's name will only be protected in the part(s) of Britain in which it is registered, and it is open to the Commission register another party with a similar name in any remaining part(s) of Great Britain (e.g. the 'Green Party' is registered in England and Wales, and a separate 'Scottish Green Party' is registered in Scotland).

Registering to contest different types of elections

When registering, political parties can make declarations that they only intend to contest certain types of elections. This affects the type of elections at which they are allowed to field candidates, and also the reporting requirements that they are subject to. If your party does not intend to contest certain types of election, you may wish to consider the following points and submit an application on that basis:

- [Minor Parties](#)

A minor party is a party that is registered only to contest parish elections in England and community elections in Wales (although parties that register as minor parties may also choose to register their name in Scotland). There is no requirement for a group or organisation to register a name in order to stand at these elections, since candidates are allowed to use a description of up to six words at parish or community elections without this being registered. However, parties that do choose to register as minor parties may subsequently choose to amend their registration to enable them to contest other elections in Great Britain

and Northern Ireland. Their name will also be protected in the part(s) of Britain in which they are registered.

Parties that register as minor parties are not required to submit a constitution or financial scheme, and do not need to register a party treasurer or campaigns officer.

[British parties that do not intend to contest Westminster elections](#)

Parties in Great Britain that contest elections to Westminster are subject to extra donation reporting requirements during campaign periods for Westminster Parliamentary elections. Parties that do not intend to contest elections to Westminster (eg, parties that intend to contest district council elections, or one of the National Assemblies) can make a 'declaration of exemption' when registering as a party. This means that the party is exempt from the extra reporting requirements.

The declaration can be withdrawn at any time if the party decides to field candidates at Westminster elections. In addition, parties that do not make the declaration when registering can choose to do so at a later stage.

This section does not currently apply to parties in Northern Ireland, which are not subject to any donation reporting requirements.

Local branches and other sections of the party

There is no requirement for local branches of a party to register independently with the Commission, since a national party's registration covers all of its branches and sections.

However, parties that comprise different branches and sections will need to consider whether they need to register any Accounting Units (AUs) with the Commission. AUs are sections of the party that are allowed to manage their finances separately from the main party accounts. Examples of AUs are: a regional section of the party (eg, the Yorkshire Imaginary Party) or a youth branch of the party (eg, the Imaginary Party Youth Group). For each AU that is registered, a party will need to register certain details with the Commission (eg, address, officers etc).

If a party has separate branches, constituency associations and other affiliated organisations, but does not allow or want them to control their own finances, then these do not need to be registered. However, they will need to be listed in the party's financial scheme.

There is no right or wrong way for a party to organise its finances. However, the Commission expects that most smaller parties will not need to register any AU.

Party names

A registered party's name can be up to six words long. The name can be in English or Welsh (on the Great Britain register), or English or Irish (on the Northern Ireland register). If a party name is in Welsh or Irish, there is no need to provide an English translation, but if a translation is provided, both the Welsh/Irish and the English name will be jointly registered as party name.

A full translation must be provided for a party name in any other language.

The Commission will not register a party name if, in its opinion, the name:

- is the same as the name of another party in the same part of the register;
- is likely to result in electors confusing the name with that of another party in the same part of the register;
- is more than six words long;
- is obscene or offensive;
- includes words which if published would be likely to result in the commission of an offence;
- is not wholly in Roman script;
- includes any word or expression prohibited by the Registration of Political Parties (Prohibited Words and Expressions) Order 2001;

The Order specifies that:

- Party names can only include any of the following words

Duke	Duchess	Her Majesty	His Majesty
King	Prince	Princess	Queen
Royal	Royalty		

where the words form part of the name of a place, institution or local government area.

- Party names can only include any of the following words:

Britain	British	England	English	National	Scotland
Scots	Scottish	United Kingdom		Wales	Welsh

where they are qualified by another word or expression other than the registered name of a party already registered in the relevant part of the UK. For example, it is not possible to register the name 'English Labour Party.'

- Party names can only include any of the following words:

Independent	Official	Unofficial
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where they are qualified by another word or expression other than the registered name of a registered party, the word 'party', or any of the words 'independent', 'official' or 'unofficial.' For example, it is not possible to register the name 'Independent Conservative Party.'

- Party names can only include any of the following words:

Ratepayers

Residents

Tenants

where they are qualified by the name of a local government or geographical area.

Party Emblems

A registered party is allowed up to three emblems for use next to its candidates' names on a ballot paper (a party applying to register in Great Britain and Northern Ireland may submit three emblems for each register entry).

The Commission is unable to approve any emblems which:

- would be likely to be confused by voters with an emblem already registered by another party in the same part(s) of the register;
- is obscene or offensive;
- is of a character such that its publication would be likely to amount to the commission of an offence;
- includes a word or expression prohibited by the Registration of Political Parties (Prohibited Words and Expressions) Order 2001 (see above).

Party Officers

The PPERA requires that each registered party has a registered party leader, nominating officer and treasurer. A party can also choose to register a campaigns officer, or an additional officer if necessary. Parties must have at least two different people registered as officers of the party.

The same person can be registered as leader, nominating officer and treasurer. However, where one person fills all these posts, an additional officer must be registered (this could be a campaigns officer or another officer of the party).

Different officers within a party have different responsibilities for various party and electoral matters.

- Leader

The party leader does not have any direct responsibilities to fulfil under the PPERA. However, if a party treasurer resigns, the party leader is responsible for ensuring that the party complies with the PPERA until such time as a new party treasurer is appointed.

- Nominating Officer

The party nominating officer does not have any responsibilities under the PPERA. However, under the Representation of the People Act 1983, a party's nominating officer is responsible for:

- the submission by party representatives of lists of election candidates;
- the issue of certificates authorising the description to be included in nomination papers for party's election candidates;
- the approval of descriptions and emblems to be used on a party's nomination and ballot papers at elections.

- Treasurer

Under the PPERA, the party treasurer is the officer who bears responsibility for ensuring that the party complies with the financial requirements laid down by the Act. Therefore it will be the party treasurer to whom the Commission sends most of its correspondence. Further information is available in the following sections on financial schemes, but in brief the main responsibilities of the party treasurer are as follows:

- informing the Commission of any changes to the registered addresses and officers of the party;
- returning reports of donations made to the party;
- submitting the party's annual accounts;
- making a return of party campaign expenditure (if applicable).

- Campaigns Officer

A party may also choose to register a campaigns officer. Where a campaign officer is registered, that person assumes responsibility for the management of a party's campaign expenditure (this is separate to election expenses incurred by a candidate or election agent) from the registered treasurer. The campaigns officer will also be responsible for complying with the controls on referendum expenditure.

Party constitution

It is a requirement for registration that a political party has a constitution. A party's constitution should set out the structure and organisation of the party, and may be called by another name. It may also say something about the aims of the party.

Party financial scheme

As a condition of registration, a party must have a financial scheme that indicates how the party will comply with the financial requirements imposed by the PPERA. The Commission recommends that small parties adopt the financial scheme that it has produced, as this scheme meets the requirements for registration. A copy of this scheme, in addition to information about the financial requirements of the PPERA, is available at Annex 1 and in the next section of this booklet.

Financial requirements of the PPERA – what they mean for new parties.

Requirements

The PPERA imposes a series of requirements on the financial affairs of registered political parties and, in certain instances, AUs. These cover the following areas:

- annual statement of accounts;
- acceptance and reporting of donations;
- incurring of and reporting of expenditure at regulated elections.

A party's financial scheme must cover all of these requirements.

Accounting requirements: annual statement of accounts

All registered political parties are required to maintain and submit an annual statement of accounts to The Electoral Commission within a specified period after the end of a parties' accounting year.

To do so, all parties that register with the Commission are required to specify the accounting year that the party will work to. However, parties that have an elected representative to the Westminster Parliament, Scottish Parliament, Northern Ireland Assembly, Welsh Assembly or European Parliament must adopt the Commission's common accounting year of January 1st – December 31st. Accounts must be sent to the Commission, in a format laid down by the Commission, within three months of the end of the financial year if the party's gross income or total expenditure is of £250,000 or less. Parties whose income or expenditure is greater than £250,000 are required to have their accounts audited, and submit them to the Commission within six months of the end of the financial year.

Groups or parties that register with the Commission and expect to have accounts of less than £5,000 per year will be subject to a light touch approach in relation to their accounts. The Commission has specified a simple, income/expenditure format of accounts for small parties to use. On registration, the Commission will write to parties to advise them of these requirements. A sample set of accounts for a small residents association with accounts of less than £5,000 is enclosed at Annex 2 for reference.

Donation requirements: acceptance and reporting of donations

The PPERA imposes restrictions on the individuals and organisations that can make donations to a registered political party in Great Britain. Under the NI exemption, registered political parties in Northern Ireland are exempt from these requirements until February 2005. The Commission will write to parties

registered in Northern Ireland in due course to advise them of whether this exemption is to be extended.

Political parties can only accept donations of more than £200 if they are from a permissible donor. All registered parties are required to submit a donation report to the Electoral Commission specifying any donations of more than £5000 from a permissible donor (or £1000 to an AU of the party), and any donations received from impermissible or unidentifiable donors (parties are legally required to return any such donations). Parties are required to submit these reports four times a year. In addition, parties are also subject to additional reporting requirement during general election periods, and must submit reports detailing any donations of more than £5000 received by the party during every week of the campaign.

Although all registered parties (other than minor parties) are required to submit a quarterly return to the Commission within thirty days of the end of each calendar quarter, the Commission recognises that many parties will have no donations of more than £200 and no impermissible or unidentifiable donations to report. Therefore, the Commission has specifically designed a 'nil return' form for registered parties with no relevant donations. For parties that receive no donations of more than £200 and do not intend to contest Westminster elections, the PPERA should not impose any other requirements.

Parties that do receive donations of more than £1000 to an accounting unit or £5000 to the central party are subject to the reporting requirements set down in the PPERA. Further guidance can be obtained from the Commission's guidance 'Explanatory Notes on Donations to Political Parties.'

Campaign Expenditure requirements: incurring and reporting expenditure

The PPERA imposes limits on the amount of campaign expenditure that can be incurred by registered parties at elections to any of the following institutions: Westminster and European Parliaments; Scottish Parliament; National Assembly for Wales; and the Northern Ireland Assembly. These limits vary according to the election being contested (eg, from £45,000 per constituency for a European election to £10,000 for an election to the National Assembly for Wales). Parties incurring campaign expenditure at any of the elections referred to above are to ensure that expenditure is only incurred by persons so authorised to do so, and to submit an accurate return to the Electoral Commission detailing all campaign expenditure incurred.

Expenditure at local government elections is only controlled when it is incurred during a regulated period by a party contesting an election to any of the institutions listed above. Therefore, for small, locally based parties concerned only with council elections, the Commission would not expect the campaign expenditure requirements to have a significant impact. Furthermore, for those parties that only intend to field a few number of candidates at a national election, the requirements should also be straightforward.

Party financial schemes

As a condition of registration, all groups wishing to register as political parties with the Electoral Commission are required to indicate how they will comply with the requirements set out above. This must be done in a financial scheme submitted as part of a party's application to register with the Commission.

In order to help prospective parties in registering, the Commission has drafted financial schemes that can be used by parties that do not have branches, Accounting Units or a campaigns officer (see annex 1). The scheme assumes that the party will not appoint deputy treasurers and that the party's financial year runs from 1 January to 31 December. Although the scheme might seem more relevant to larger political parties with greater finances, the points it covers must be adopted by all parties. The Commission therefore recommends that all parties adopt the scheme that it has produced. If your party intends to register branches or Accounting Units, or other financial officers, please contact the Registration and Compliance Team, who can help you to produce a financial scheme that meets your party's individual needs.

Annex 1

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FINANCIAL SCHEME

Introduction

- 1) This scheme sets out how the _____ will regulate its financial affairs for the purpose of compliance with the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 ("the Act").

Constitution

- 2) A copy of the _____'s constitution, including details of its structure and organisation, and how these are determined, is enclosed.

Accounting Units

- 3) The _____ does not wish to have any accounting units separate from its central organisation.

Other Organisations within the Party

- 4) The _____ constitution does not provide for the establishment of ward branches or affiliated organisations within the party.

For the purpose of compliance with the Act, the financial affairs of any newly established ward branches or affiliated organisations, will be wholly controlled by the party treasurer.

Role of the Party Treasurer

- 5) The registered treasurer of the _____ is responsible for the whole party's compliance with the financial provisions of the Act and in particular for:
 - a) setting up and maintaining accounting records capable of meeting the accounting record keeping requirements of the Act;
 - b) setting up and maintaining arrangements for ensuring that annual statements of accounts for the party are prepared, approved, audited if necessary and submitted to the Electoral Commission on time;
 - c) developing and putting in place arrangements to ensure that any impermissible or unidentifiable donations of more than £200 to the party are recorded and returned to sender or, if that is not possible, surrendered to the Commission;
 - d) developing and putting in place arrangements for recording donations of more than £200 and for the submission of quarterly donation reports covering donations exceeding £5,000 and any

- impermissible or anonymous donations of more than £200; submitting a nil return if there are no reportable donations;
- e) developing a plan for ensuring weekly donation reports can be submitted during general election periods;
- f) ensuring that the incurring of campaign expenditure and the payment of claims are duly authorised and that all relevant receipts and invoices are kept;
- g) developing and implementing a campaign expenditure budget that complies with the limits, together with arrangements for monitoring compliance;
- h) developing a plan to ensure the compilation, auditing (if necessary) and timely submission to the Commission of a campaign expenditure return when the campaign is over;
- i) if there is a referendum to which Part VII of the Act applies, developing and putting in place arrangements for complying with the controls on referendum expenditure (this will be done by adapting the party's arrangements for the control of campaign expenditure); and
- j) ensuring that any grants from the commission to the party are spent in accordance with the conditions of grant imposed by the Commission.
- k) being responsible for the compliance of ward branches with the financial requirements of the Act.

Deputy Treasurers with Responsibility for Campaign Expenditure

- 6) The _____ does not intend to appoint any deputy treasurers with responsibility for campaign expenditure.

Promoting Compliance with the Act

- 7) The party treasurer will ensure that the party leader and all other officers and members of the _____ have sufficient knowledge of the party's financial obligations under the Act to ensure that the party as a whole complies with these obligations.

Financial Year

- 8) The party's financial year will run from 1st January to 31st December.

Amendments to the Financial Scheme

- 9) The party treasurer will ensure that any proposed amendments to this financial scheme are submitted to the Electoral Commission for approval.

Signed by: _____ **(Party Treasurer) on:** _____

Annex 2

The Small Made-up Party Statement of Accounts

For the year ended 31 December 2002

Introduction

This Statement of Accounts provides a report on the political and financial activities of the Small Made Up Party. The Small Made Up Party registered address is:

14 The Grove
Small Heath
England
SP3 F12

Tel: (0123) 745689
Fax: (0123) 745680
Email: smallmadeup@whatever.com

For the purposes of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 the responsible officers are:

Mr Boss – Leader and Nominating Officer
Miss Hardestworker – Treasurer
Mr Neatandtidy – Campaigns Officer

Review of political activities

Overview

The main focus of activity for the party this year was the local council elections, which were held in early May. It was pleasing to see that due to the hard work of party members, we were able to hold onto our two seats on the Council. Unfortunately, we had expected that Mrs Hopeless would have been elected, but she narrowly lost out to Mr Bigwig

We have continued to make strong representations with our colleagues from the Minor party to improve street lightning on the High Street. We are pleased to report that extra funding has been identified to meet our demands.

Membership

The party's membership consists of several different categories:

- Full members who live in the Constituency and;
- Out of constituency members.

At the end of the year, the membership of the party was as follows:

Membership Type	2002	2001
Full	30	25
Out of Constituency	3	2
Total	33	27

Campaigning

Campaigning focused on the three wards, where we had put forward candidates. Our extensive campaigning focussed on door-to-door canvassing and meeting people in the street allowing us to focus on issues important to individuals. We also held a small number of meetings in each ward, but the turnout to them was very disappointing. Finally, this was the first year, where we have distributed out policies over the Internet. From the hits on our web site, we believe this is a useful medium to distribute the party's message widely, at a very small cost.

Review of financial activities

Overview

As in previous years, we continue to develop our financial basis, which is reflected in the small increase in our membership base.

Receipts and Payments

Comparative figures are shown for the previous years.

Receipts

- There was a small increase in income this year compared to last chiefly because of a grant from the Council. The one concern that we have is that despite increasing our membership base, income reduced.

Payments

Overall, as one would expect, total expenditure fell during the year, in line with the reduction in income from activities. The main item being fundraising costs.

Assets

In line with the continued improvement in the party's operating performance, overall the party's funds have increased.

The Small Made-up Party

Receipts and Payments Account

For the Year Ended 31 December 2002

Receipts	Notes	2001 (£)	2002 (£)
Electoral Commission - grant		500	-
Local Authority		-	1,500
Subscriptions		700	450
Sale of magazines		80	-
Fund raising events - proceeds	3	1,100	900
Investment income			
Bank interest		40	50
Notional income	2	100	100
Dividends		60	50
Total Receipts		<u>2,580</u>	<u>3,050</u>
Payments			
Notional expenditure	2	100	100
Printing	1	200	150
Insurances		100	100
Function expenses		200	150
Fund raising events - costs	3	300	100
Stationery, postage, telephone etc		150	100
Total Payments		<u>1,050</u>	<u>700</u>
Net receipts over payments for the year		1,530	2,350
Cash and balances at 1st January		1,035	2,565
Cash and bank balances at 31st December		<u>2,565</u>	<u>4,915</u>

The Small Made-up Party

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

As at 31 December 2002

	2001	2002
	(£)	(£)
Monetary Assets		
Bank and cash balances:		
Bank deposit reserve account	4,300	3,100
Bank current account	1,450	120
Cash float	50	50
Total for General Purposes Fund monetary assets	<u>5,800</u>	<u>3,270</u>
Other General Purposes Fund monetary assets:		
Subscriptions	<u>10</u>	<u>20</u>
Liabilities		
Printing Costs	<u>100</u>	<u>200</u>

The Small Made-up Party

Statement of Assets and Liabilities

As at 31 December 2002

Notes to the Accounts

1. Related Party Transactions

The printing of the party's campaign material was contracted to Jack Brown. Mr. Brown is a member of the party's Membership Committee.

2. Notional Expenditure

The party was provided the free use of a hall for our tea dance by J. Daniels. The commercial rent for the hall is £100 and this is included as notional income and expenditure in the Receipts and Payments Account.

3. Fundraising

The party runs a number of fundraising activities, these include:

- Whist Drives;
- Raffles;
- Tea dance.