

Changes to postal and proxy voting

This document describes the changes being introduced in law from The Representation of the People (Postal and Proxy Voting etc.) (Amendment) Regulations 2023, which will begin to take effect from 31 October 2023.

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Identity checking requirements

From 31 October 2023, all postal and proxy vote applications must contain a National Insurance Number, or a reason why one cannot be provided, in order to verify the applicant's identity.

Their name, address, date of birth and National Insurance Number will be verified against the Department of Works and Pensions (DWP) data.

Where an application fails to match with DWP data, applicants will be required to provide documentary evidence to verify their identity – such as a copy of their photo card driving licence, or a copy of their passport.

Where this is not possible, electors must submit an attestation to confirm their identity.

Online absent vote applications

A new service will launch on www.gov.uk where voters can apply for a postal or proxy vote online.

Voters can apply for the following absent votes, both online and through a paper application:

- Postal vote
- Proxy vote for a particular election or referendum

- Proxy vote for a definite or indefinite periods for overseas electors

All other types of proxy vote are still available, but only through a paper application form.

Maximum period for an absent vote

People applying for a postal vote from 31 October 2023 onwards will only be able to hold their postal vote for a maximum period of 3 years (until “the third 31 January after their application is determined”).

There are transitional arrangements for existing postal voters (those in place before 31 October 2023). Existing postal voters will be able to vote by post until 31 January 2026 before they need to reapply.

Proxy votes can continue to be applied for an indefinite period (subject to a three yearly eligibility check, and a five yearly signature refresh). However, all existing proxy voters who have an arrangement in place before 31 October 2023 must reapply and make a fresh application by 31 January 2024.

This is because the number of people a person can act as a proxy for has been restricted. From 31 October, a person cannot act as proxy in any electoral area on behalf of more than four electors. Within the four electors, no more than two electors can be domestic electors. (Domestic electors are those who are neither service voters nor overseas electors)

We will be writing to all our proxy voters when these changes are introduced to inform them of the need to reapply by 31 January 2024.

Changes for overseas electors

Where an elector applies to be an overseas elector (or renews their current overseas registration) on or after 16 January 2024, their entitlement to be registered as an overseas elector will last until the “third 1st November” following the date their registration takes effect.

Where an overseas elector applies to vote by post, the postal vote will be linked to their overseas declaration and will expire on the third 1st November also.

Where an overseas elector applies to vote by proxy, they will need to refresh their signature to renew their proxy vote at the same time their registration would expire.