

My Vote My Voice Submission to Levelling Up, Housing and Communities Committee Inquiry on Electoral Registration

About us

My Vote My Voice is a democracy campaign delivered by Dimensions, Mencap and United Response to increase voter participation at the next general election. We are three of the leading providers of support for people with learning disabilities and autistic people in the UK. Together, we directly support more than 10,000 people to live their lives with choice and control. My Vote My Voice wants to make accessible voting a priority at each election. Our aim is to get young people and adults, who are either autistic or have a learning disability, interested in politics, to register to vote, and ultimately to vote

Background

1. People with a learning disability as have much right to vote as anyone else. However, multiple barriers prevent people with a learning disability from being able to engage in politics, register to vote and choose their preferred candidate. As a result, many people with a learning disability do not feel engaged in the democratic process.
2. The barriers many people with learning disabilities face when engaging with the voting system include:
 - A lack of understanding among some people with a learning disability of their right to vote, and belief among some that there is a 'mental capacity test' to be able to vote.
 - The way some politicians and political parties communicate can be inaccessible.
 - Voter registration forms are often complicated and not accompanied by an easy read guide. However, the online form does have an easy read guide which Mencap produced.
 - Many people with a learning disability don't get the support they need to learn about the policies of the different parties and candidates.
 - Polling stations can be inaccessible and confusing which may lead to a bad experience and therefore put people off voting.
3. For people with a learning disability, getting on the electoral register can be easy or difficult depending on their circumstances and the level of support an individual receives. For those with support from either friends, family or supporters, navigating the online form or filling in a paper form can be easy.

4. Mencap have worked with the government to create an easy read guide to completing the online electoral registration form. However, we acknowledge that this is not a silver bullet in terms of accessibility but hope that this helps some people with a learning disability to join the electoral register.
5. As mentioned above, there continue to be some people (including family and supporters) who believe people with a learning disability are not eligible or do not have the capacity to vote. In these cases, the individual may not receive the support required to complete the form and therefore be prevented from voting.
6. If an individual with a learning disability does not have support, they may find the online or paper forms difficult to complete. There should be no scenario where a person with a learning disability feels they are not able to receive support to join the electoral register.
7. A system of automatic registration could ensure that those who do not have support to complete forms or are not aware of their right to vote, join the electoral register. This would have a trickle-down effect on awareness of voting rights, with the arrival of polling cards and other materials from local authorities.
8. The requirement to re-register after moving can also place another barrier to people with a learning disability participating in our democracy. Any future automatic registration system should include the automatic re-registering of people when the local authority is made aware of a person moving into the area.
9. Local authorities will have the details of many people with a learning disability moving into their area given some will be accessing care and others will be known through other measures for example by council tax exemption, housing benefit or social housing.

Data Issues

10. Exploring how existing public data could be utilized to support further reform to our voter registration system is welcome.
11. The December 2015 Great Britain registers (those published at the end of the transition to Individual Electoral Registration) indicated that the local government registers were 91% accurate and 84% complete, with the parliamentary registers being 91% accurate and 85% complete. These figures meant that an estimated eight million people were missing from the electoral registers.

Contact

Ali Gunn, Chair, My Vote My Voice campaign steering group

Email: ali.gunn@unitedresponse.org.uk