

Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland 2004–2005 Annual Report

*Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 14(4) of the
Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 as amended by
Article 6(1) of the Electoral Law (Northern Ireland) Order 1972*

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Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland Report for the Year 2004–2005

The Rt. Hon. Peter Hain MP
Her Majesty's Secretary of State for Northern Ireland
Northern Ireland Office
11 Millbank
LONDON SW1P 4QE

27 October 2005

Dear Secretary of State

I have the honour; in accordance with section 14 of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962, to present this annual report of my proceedings under that Act for the year ending 31 March 2005.

*DA Stanley
Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland.*

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Belfast
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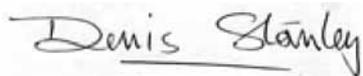
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FOREWORD

This is the Annual Report of the Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland (CEO) to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland in accordance with section 14 of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962.

This Report relates to the year from 1 April 2004 to 31 March 2005. The Report is an account of the operations of the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland (EONI) during that period and provides an assessment of the achievements and a comparison of progress against the objectives, targets and performance measures set in the Corporate and Business Plan 2004-05.

The year saw the European Parliamentary election on 10 June 2004, a report by the House of Commons Northern Ireland Affairs Committee into registration and the out workings of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 and detailed preparation for the Parliamentary General Election and the District Council elections which were anticipated for 5 May 2005. I am, as ever, pleased to report that staff handled these challenges positively, professionally and effectively and that all the administrative activities were carried out comprehensively, efficiently and in good time. As usual, I must pay particular tribute to the small band of permanent staff who give so much to ensure that registration and elections run smoothly and to the several thousand part-time staff who deliver the service during the annual canvass and at elections.

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Denis Stanley". The signature is written in black ink on a light-colored background.

DENIS STANLEY
CHIEF ELECTORAL OFFICER

1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Role of the Chief Electoral Officer

The CEO is the Registration Officer for the whole of Northern Ireland. He is also the Returning Officer for all elections and referendums in Northern Ireland. He holds a Crown appointment, being appointed under statute by the Secretary of State. He is independent of Government in his interpretation and administration of electoral law.

The CEO is required to carry out the functions conferred on him by law. His main duties in this regard are;

- a. Preparing and maintaining an accurate Electoral Register which also serves to select a panel for jury service.
- b. Ensuring the smooth running of elections and referendums in Northern Ireland and maintaining the public perception of an impartial and independent electoral service.
- c. Preparing polling station schemes.
- d. Minimising the scope for electoral abuse.
- e. Providing advice to the Secretary of State on all electoral matters.
- f. Providing advice to the Local Government Boundary Commission and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.
- g. Ensuring that services are delivered efficiently and effectively with due consideration for value for money.

The CEO is responsible for ensuring that the requirements of law on equality, disability, data protection and freedom of information are properly addressed in all the activities carried out on his behalf.

The CEO may delegate the performance of his functions. Accordingly the EONI was established to enable the CEO to deliver electoral services. Although the CEO has delegated the day-to-day administration of his functions to the staff of the EONI, he remains responsible for overall organisation, management and staffing.

1.2 Funding

The operations of the EONI are funded by the Northern Ireland Office and the costs of running elections by HM Treasury. The Secretary of State for Northern Ireland is accountable to Parliament for all expenditure by the EONI.

1.3 Voter Awareness and Education

With the establishment of the Electoral Commission in 2000, responsibility for voter education and awareness was taken over by that body and funding withdrawn from the EONI.

2. PERFORMANCE AGAINST KEY TARGETS

2.1 Corporate Aim

The Corporate Aim of the EONI is to serve democracy by administering the CEO's functions as defined in electoral law in a comprehensive, professional, timely, effective, efficient and economic manner equally across all the people of Northern Ireland

2.2 Objectives, Key Targets and Outcomes

To meet this aim the CEO defined a number of main objectives which encapsulate his statutory functions. These objectives were in turn translated into specific operational targets for 2004-05. Because of delay in finalising funding for the year with the NIO the EONI's business plan for 2004-05 could not formally be completed or published. Nevertheless, the EONI developed the key targets described below and there were used to guide and assess performance during the year. Performance against other administrative targets is described in section 15.

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Key Target</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
To prepare, publish and maintain an up-to-date, accurate and comprehensive Electoral Register for Northern Ireland	1. To compile a Register at 1 December 2004, with reference to 15 October 2004, which is not less complete in respect of eligible applicants than the Register at 1 September 2004	The Register published on 1 December 2004 was 2.6% below the Register at 1 September 2004. The Government, on the advice of the CEO, reintroduced carryover of electors, in this case those registered at 1 September 2004 who failed to respond to the 2004 canvass were carried over to the Register published on 1 April 2005. This, together with outreach projects, led to a 6.8% increase in the Register published at 1 April 2005 compared with 1 September 2004.
	2. To compare all dates of birth on registration forms with previously obtained personal identifiers and request and obtain clarification on all inconsistent data.	Accomplished.

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Key Target</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
	3. To complete checking of all national insurance numbers and dates of birth on the Register with the Department for Work and Pensions database by 31 December 2004.	Accomplished.
	4. To publish a Register at 1 December 2004 and revisions of the Register at the first of each month.	Accomplished.
To conduct Parliamentary, Assembly, European and District Council elections and referendums in Northern Ireland effectively, impartially, within statutory timetables and to prevent electoral fraud.	1. In the event of any election held up to 1 June 2005 to take all the preliminary statutory action required strictly in accordance with the legislation and statutory timetables.	Accomplished.
	2. In the event of any election held up to 1 April 2005 to operate all the polling stations listed in the current polling station scheme during the whole of the prescribed duration of the election so that each polling station is manned during the whole period by a Presiding Officer and Poll Clerk and to provide appropriate absent voting facilities	Accomplished.
	3. Not less than 90% of people who voted should view the election arrangements as effective and impartial.	Accomplished. Based on complaints lodged with the EONI and on the evidence provided by the Electoral Commission.
To design, publish and maintain a polling station scheme.	1. To evaluate the polling station arrangements within one month of any election up to 31 March 2005 and consult on and implement changes as appropriate.	Accomplished.
	2. Not less than 90% of electors should view the arrangements as satisfactory.	Accomplished. Based on complaints lodged with the EONI and on the evidence provided by the Electoral Commission.

<i>Objective</i>	<i>Key Target</i>	<i>Outcome</i>
To implement and maintain arrangements to eliminate electoral fraud.	1. To investigate all reported attempted fraud, assess and take action as appropriate to reinforce or improve the relevant control(s) on fraud.	Accomplished.
	2. To identify, collect and present evidence in respect of each fraud sufficient to sustain prosecution.	No prosecutable fraud was detected.
To provide advice to the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland on electoral matters.	To take a view from the Secretary of State on the timeliness, quality and range of advice given.	Accomplished.
To provide advice to the Local Government Boundary Commission and the Boundary Commission for Northern Ireland.	To take the views of the Commissions on the timeliness, quality and range of advice given.	Accomplished.

3. ELECTORAL REGISTRATION

3.1 The Electoral Register

The CEO is by law required to publish a completely fresh Electoral Register not later than 1 December each year and accordingly, after the completion of the autumn 2004 canvass, the Register was published on 1 December 2004.

Throughout the year, except for the period of the annual canvass, the Register was amended monthly through the process of “rolling registration”. Thus, any person eligible for inclusion on the Register was able to apply to be added, or to have their registered address altered if they moved home. Registered electors were also removed by this process if they left Northern Ireland or died. Thus the Register was properly maintained, ready to be published on the first of any month (other than October and November) to facilitate any election which might be called.

During the period of this report, two renumbered Registers were published – the first on 4 May 2004 for the European Parliamentary Elections in June 2004 and the second on the statutory date of 1 December 2004. Throughout the year, the numbers of electors fluctuated as a result of rolling registration and also because of the “looming election” effect by which more persons than normal apply to be added to the Register immediately in advance of an election.

A breakdown of the Register by constituency as published on 1 December 2004 is given below, in comparison with the earlier Registers published on 1 December 2002, 1 September 2003, 2 February 2004 (after the publication of the Register had to be deferred because of the November 2003 Assembly elections), 4 May 2004 (for the European Parliamentary elections), and 1 September 2004 (prior to the 2004 canvass).

CONSTITUENCY	01/12/2002	01/09/2003	02/02/2004	04/05/2004	01/09/2004	01/12/2004
Belfast East	50929	51852	50005	49983	49820	48503
Belfast North	49937	51355	49114	49625	49530	46008
Belfast South	49349	50707	49403	49514	49447	46718
Belfast West	48153	50873	47183	48915	48837	46054
East Antrim	54569	55477	54727	54747	54658	53307
East Londonderry	55466	56202	55260	55241	55142	54759
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	63010	64355	62993	64005	63903	61774
Foyle	62801	65312	62404	63434	63511	61386
Lagan Valley	65939	67921	65642	65712	65636	65837
Mid Ulster	58810	60113	58950	59504	59456	58346
Newry & Armagh	66802	68740	67433	68119	68026	66593
North Antrim	69728	70493	69942	70119	70046	70087
North Down	56606	57426	56137	56089	55980	54734
South Antrim	62349	63644	62983	63212	63172	60315
South Down	68317	70155	68515	68919	68892	68022
Strangford	65558	66314	64796	64810	64649	63882
Upper Bann	67595	68816	67713	67895	67753	67033
West Tyrone	56507	57796	55960	57097	57060	54243
TOTAL	1072425	1097551	1069160	1076940	1075518	1047601

The above table shows that the number of registered electors following the conclusion of the autumn canvass in 2004 was less than that after the previous two canvasses in 2002 and 2003 – 1,047,601 represents a fall of 2.0% from the Register published on 2 February 2004 after the 2003 canvass and a fall of 2.3% from that in December 2002. The increase in the Register between February and May 2004 was due largely to the efforts of political parties who sought to ensure that as many of their supporters as possible were registered prior to the European Parliamentary elections in June 2004.

Figures from research carried out on behalf of the Electoral Commission indicate that 83.1% of the eligible electorate appeared on the December 2004 Register. The Commission also has expressed the view that the information held on the Register is accurate.

3.2 Autumn Canvass 2004

Almost 1000 canvassers commenced work at the beginning of September and delivered to every residential unit in Northern Ireland guidance notes and either individual registration forms, preprinted with the names and addresses of every person on the Register on 1 August 2004, or forms preprinted with addresses only to households where no one had been included on the August Register. In addition, they carried blank forms to leave for new applicants, whether in dwellings already on the EONI database or those recently built. The canvassers revisited each address within ten days to collect completed forms or to give assistance as required. If the completed forms were unavailable additional forms, further notes and freepost envelopes were left to help electors return their completed forms. 252,000 such reminders were despatched.

In late October, reminders were sent by post to all those who had been previously registered but had not by that stage submitted their return. Further blank forms were also sent to addresses where no one had by that stage registered and about which the canvasser was unable to obtain information, for example a holiday home or second residence.

In tandem with the canvass managed through the Area Electoral Offices, letters were sent to each post-primary school in Northern Ireland which had pupils in years 13 and 14 and to all colleges of further education, enclosing blank registration forms, requesting that these should be distributed to students aged 17 and over. Forms were also made widely available as part of an outreach programme in District Council offices, leisure centres, youth clubs and offices of the Housing Executive, Social Security Agency and Job Centres.

Research carried out by the Electoral Commission reported that around 92.5% of former electors re-registered in December 2004. New entrants are estimated to have totalled over 53,000.

3.3 Publication of the Register

When the new Register was published, copies were placed for public inspection in the nine Area Electoral Offices and at the offices of the 26 District Councils. Thus electors could check that their names and addresses were correctly recorded. Copies were also made available to political parties, MPs, MLAs and Councillors. In addition, electors could telephone the EONI central advice line and provide their personal identifiers for confirmation of their registration. Through this process EONI staff also despatched rolling registration application forms as necessary.

3.4 Data Comparison

The personal data provided by each elector when registered, either at the canvass or through rolling registration, were compared with that previously held. Where there was any discrepancy over the signature, date of birth or national insurance number, the elector was contacted in writing.

During 2003 and 2004, the EONI had been working closely with the Department for Work and Pensions (DWP) and a Memorandum of Understanding to match data electronically, using the fields of surname, date of birth and national insurance number, had been agreed in June 2004. The full EONI database was subsequently compared with that held by DWP and a 96% match ultimately confirmed. Following the 2004 canvass, the records of all new electors and those whose data had not been confirmed in the spring of 2004 were again compared with the records held by DWP. This showed a 94.6% match and during the summer months of 2004 electors whose details did not match were contacted again to correct the anomalies, most of which were of a minor nature.

3.5 Report by the Northern Ireland Affairs Committee

The Northern Ireland Affairs Committee began a new enquiry in 2003 into electoral registration in Northern Ireland in light of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002. This was a follow up to its previous report on electoral malpractice and focused in particular upon the electoral registration process and the effectiveness of the anti-fraud measures brought in by the 2002 Act. The Committee concluded that the 2002 Act appeared to be working well in reducing levels of electoral fraud but that one major initiative which had contributed to this reduction (the abolition of the so-called 'carry-forward' mechanism by which the names on the electoral register remain on it automatically for one year) had had the unintended effect of contributing to the steep and progressive decline in the numbers of voters appearing on the Register over recent years. They considered that, unless checked quickly, this decline would threaten the integrity of the electoral system in Northern Ireland.

Just prior to the publication the report in December 2004, The Rt Hon John Spellar MP, the then Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, issued a written statement in the House of Commons in which he highlighted the problem of the decline in the Northern Ireland Register and indicated that the government intended to introduce legislation to permit the CEO to reinstitute the 'carry forward' as a temporary measure. This was enacted as the Electoral Registration (Northern Ireland) Act 2005.

In his response to the Committee's report, the CEO said, inter alia, how keen the EONI was to work with the Electoral Commission to ensure that as many people as were eligible registered and keen to see legislation introduced to implement the Committee's idea of placing a responsibility on adults in households to ensure that 17 year olds were entered on the Register. However, he questioned the accuracy of figures relating to the level of registration in Great Britain and felt that because of the measures introduced by the 2002 Act the Northern Ireland Register was very accurate, albeit not fully complete. It was this latter matter which now would be addressed.

4. EUROPEAN PARLIAMENTARY ELECTIONS

4.1 Preparation and Planning

European Parliamentary elections are some of the few for which the EONI can prepare well in advance since the date is set in legislation. As is the case for all elections, an election plan was prepared detailing the full range of tasks and procedures required and the personnel responsible for their delivery. However, for this election it was possible to incorporate in to the plan targets and milestones with specific dates from January 2004 until after the election on 10 June.

At a European Parliamentary election Northern Ireland is a single constituency with three Members elected by the STV method of proportional representation. This single constituency is administered on a Westminster Parliamentary constituency basis, ie it is broken down into 18 units, two of which are managed by each Area Electoral Office. This management extends through the provision of polling stations, equipment and furniture, the allocation, training and payment of staff and to the initial verification of the ballot paper accounts with the contents of each ballot box. Only after this had been completed on the day following the poll, were all the ballot papers transported to the central count at the Kings Hall, Balmoral, for the main count on Monday 14 June. Details of the Local Returning Officers and the nine verification centres is given below.

CONSTITUENCIES	LOCAL RETURNING OFFICER	VERIFICATION CENTRES
FOYLE & MID ULSTER	Patricia Murphy	Templemore Sports Complex Buncrana Road LONDONDERRY BT48 7QL
NORTH ANTRIM & EAST LONDONDERRY	Jacqui Reid	The Joey Dunlop Centre 33 Garryduff Road BALLYMONEY BT53 7DB
WEST TYRONE & FERMANAGH & SOUTH TYRONE	Martin Fox	Omagh Leisure Complex Old Mountfield Road Omagh
UPPER BANN & NEWRY & ARMAGH	Amanda Mason	Banbridge Leisure Centre Downshire Road BANBRIDGE

CONSTITUENCIES	LOCAL RETURNING OFFICER	VERIFICATION CENTRES
SOUTH DOWN & LAGAN VALLEY	Majella Morgan	Dromore Community Centre Lurgan Road DROMORE
EAST ANTRIM & SOUTH ANTRIM	Heather Wilson	Valley Leisure Centre 40 Church Road NEWTOWNABBEY BT36 7LT
STRANGFORD & NORTH DOWN	Jeanette Murray	Ards Leisure Centre William Street NEWTOWNARDS BT23 4EJ
BELFAST NORTH & BELFAST WEST	Gareth Quinn	Alexander Hall Kings Hall Complex Lisburn Road BELFAST
BELFAST SOUTH & BELFAST EAST	Sharon Allen	As above

4.2 Polling Station Scheme

The polling station scheme had been reviewed and minor changes made following the Assembly Elections in November 2003 and, in effect, on a continuous basis thereafter (see also section 6). For example, changes were made during the spring of 2004, to facilitate disabled electors and to replace locations no longer available as polling places. On 10 June 2004, 1532 polling stations were prepared for voting in 612 polling places.

4.3 Staffing

Almost 4000 staff were employed in connection with the poll and the subsequent verification and count. On this occasion, there was little difficulty in recruiting suitable staff for polling day as the fee structure had been brought into line with that in Great Britain and staff were generally more willing to work long hours because of the time of year.

Polling staff had been well prepared for the elections as comprehensive training was enabled through the Electoral Commission. EONI staff provided for publication by the Commission detailed handbooks and manuals and assisted in the filming of training material. The Local Returning Officers for each constituency area were trained in communication skills and in using the training and general instructional materials. On polling day, this expertise was demonstrated through the confidence and efficiency of the polling staff.

4.4 Absent Voting

Under electoral fraud legislation, it is now necessary for each elector applying for an absent vote (post or proxy) to provide three personal identifiers (signature, date of birth and national insurance number, which have to be checked against those

provided at registration) in addition to having their application attested by someone other than a family member. (Absent votes are not available on demand in Northern Ireland – the applicant must give an acceptable reason). These detailed processes did not unduly delay the issue of postal and proxy votes but EONI staff had to take time to validate applications and carry out extensive checks where fraud was suspected. Similarly, when postal votes were returned to the Local Returning Officer, detailed checks were carried out under the anti-fraud legislation to verify the details provided on the Declaration of Identity. As these could be received up to 10.00 pm on the night of the poll, EONI staff were involved in these checking and verifying processes until well after the close of poll.

The table below shows the number of postal and proxy votes by constituency area at these elections.

Constituency	Total Absent Votes issued	% of eligible electorate	Total postal votes issued (+ postal proxies)	Total proxy votes issued
Belfast East	454	0.912	407	47
Belfast North	552	1.116	432	120
Belfast South	561	1.137	499	62
Belfast West	735	1.506	509	226
East Antrim	426	0.781	363	63
East Londonderry	1,377	2.503	1,243	134
Fermanagh & South Tyrone	4,525	7.076	3,772	753
Foyle	1,587	2.512	1,369	218
Lagan Valley	863	1.319	792	71
Mid Ulster	2,610	4.410	2,160	450
Newry & Armagh	1,834	2.703	1,467	367
North Antrim	1,177	1.684	998 (+1)	178
North Down	527	0.943	463 (+1)	63
South Antrim	516	0.819	428	88
South Down	1,595	2.326	1398 (+2)	195
Strangford	623	0.964	563	60
Upper Bann	1,082	1.603	917	165
West Tyrone	2,840	4.990	2171 (+2)	667
TOTALS	23,884	2.225	19,957	3,927

4.5 Voting at Polling Stations

The procedures for voting in person at polling stations was similar to that for the November 2003 Assembly Elections in that the election was conducted using the STV method of proportional Representation. As is the norm in Northern Ireland, it was compulsory for each elector to produce one of four types of photographic identification before being issued with a ballot paper. This is now such an established procedure that of approximate 542,000 electors who turned up to vote in a polling station, only 3500 (0.6%) were turned away because they did not have valid identification.

There were few problems on polling day with the vast majority of part-time staff turning up on time and there were virtually no queues of voters at any stage. However, at the close of the poll there was civil unrest at four polling places in Londonderry with petrol bombs thrown at the schools being used and at the police who responded to protect the staff inside. Unfortunately, trouble at the end of polling day in the City has become something of a tradition and after these elections the CEO therefore called upon the City Council, elected representatives and the communities affected to agree a plan with the PSNI on how best to avoid such violence at future elections. The CEO and senior colleagues attended meetings with the Council and community representatives and with the Police to help chart a way to resolve the problem.

4.6 The Electoral Identify Card

The Electoral Identify Card is one of the four forms of photographic identity permitted by legislation for use by electors at polling stations. Applications for a card can be made at any time by post and at fixed centres operated permanently in each of the Area Electoral Offices. In advance of these elections, mobile sites operated during April and May in towns and villages throughout Northern Ireland. The detailed programme was advertised in the local press in the week before each mobile unit visit. The mobile sites recommenced in March 2005 in advance of the May 2005 elections. Around 8,000 cards were issued in 2004-05, bringing the total since January 2003 to more than 97,000.

4.7 The Count

When all the ballot boxes were opened and verified on Friday 11 June at the verification centres, the ballot papers were repacked and transported to the King's Hall, Belfast, for the central count which commenced on Monday 14 June. Over 300 staff were employed at the count which went to three stages and ended in the late afternoon. This was the first occasion on which the EONI used a computer system to verify the figures at each stage – the programme had been developed and tested during the preceding months and on count day was used to check the manual calculations. In addition, each stage was displayed on large plasma screens throughout the centre. This new level of communicating results was very well received by candidates, their supporters and the media.

4.8 Results

The statistics in relation to this election and the results, by first preference votes for each candidate, are shown below.

Eligible Electorate	1072669	Number of members to be elected	3
Votes Polled	554744	% poll	51.72%
Invalid Votes	5467	Electoral Quota	137320
Total Valid Votes	549277		

Candidates		1st preference votes	Result
ALLISTER Jim	Democratic Unionist D.U.P	175761	Deemed Elected (stage 1)
DE BRUN Bairbre	Sinn Fein	144541	Deemed Elected (stage 1)
NICHOLSON Jim	Ulster Unionist Party	91164	Deemed Elected (stage 3)
MORGAN Martin	SDLP	87559	
GILLILAND John		36270	Excluded (stage 2)
McCANN Eamonn	Socialist Environmental Alliance	9172	Excluded (stage 2)
WHITCROFT Lindsay	Green Party	4810	Excluded (stage 2)

5. BY-ELECTIONS

5.1 The Northern Ireland Assembly

Two substitutes were appointed Members of the Northern Ireland Assembly. Raymond McCartney was appointed as a MLA for the Foyle Constituency on 15 July 2004 following the resignation of Mary Nelis and Sue Ramsey was appointed as a MLA for the Belfast West Constituency on 29 November 2004 following the resignation of Bairbre de Brun.

5.2 District Councils

a. Limavady

A by-election took place on 8 October 2004 for the Benbradagh DEA of Limavady District Council following the resignation of Councillor F Brolly (Sinn Fein). Brenda Chivers (Sinn Fein) was elected as a Councillor.

b. Larne

A by-election took place on 17 November 2004 for the Larne Lough DEA of Larne District Council following the death of Councillor David Fleck (UUP). Andrew Park Wilson (UUP) was elected as a Councillor.

c. Derry City

A co-option took place on 13 July 2004 for the Waterside DEA of Derry City Council following the resignation of Councillor Marie McDaid (SDLP). Martin Reilly (SDLP) was co-opted as a Councillor.

d. Newry and Mourne

A co-option took place on 2 August 2004 for the Newry Town DEA of Newry and Mourne District Council following the resignation of Councillor Davy Hyland (Sinn Fein). Mary Mathers (Sinn Fein) was co-opted as a Councillor.

e. Carrickfergus

A co-option took place on 23 August 2004 for the Knockagh Monument DEA of Carrickfergus District Council following the death of Councillor Noreen McIlwrath (Alliance). Shireen Bell (Alliance) was co-opted as a Councillor.

f. Down

A co-option took place on 20 September 2004 for the Ballynahinch DEA of Down District Council following the resignation of Councillor Harvey Bicker (UUP). Peter Gibson Bowles (UUP) was co-opted as a Councillor.

g. Belfast City

A co-option took place on 1 November 2004 for the Oldpark DEA of Belfast City Council following the resignation of Councillor Eoin O Broin (Sinn Fein). David Kennedy (Sinn Fein) was co-opted as a Councillor.

h. Lisburn City

A co-option took place on 6 December 2004 for the Dunmurry Cross DEA of Lisburn City Council following the resignation of Alderman William McDonnell (SDLP). Brian Heading (SDLP) was co-opted as a Councillor.

i. Ballymoney

A vacancy arose in the Bann Valley DEA due to the death of Robert Wilson (DUP) which remained unfilled in accordance with section 11(4) of the Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 which provides that casual vacancies occurring between 1 January in a local election year and the election day in that year shall not be filled until the election day.

j. Armagh

A vacancy arose in the Crossmore DEA due to the resignation of Thomas J Kavanagh (SDLP) which remained unfilled in accordance with section 11(4) of the

Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962 which provides that casual vacancies occurring between 1 January in a local election year and the election day in that year shall not be filled until the election day.

6. POLLING STATION SCHEME

The entire polling station scheme was put out for public consultation in January 2005 in accordance with legislative requirements. A number of submissions were received mainly from political parties and community representatives, however, as it has been the policy of the EONI to keep the scheme under constant review, most were of a minor nature. The scheme remained at 1532 polling stations in 612 polling places across Northern Ireland. In particular, attention was again paid to accessibility for disabled electors and either improvement pressed for or new locations sought where any form of difficulty had been identified. Unfortunately, some of the schools and halls used as polling places continue not to offer easy access for disabled electors and this is of great concern to the EONI, particularly where there is no practicable alternative in the local area. The EONI has a commitment under its Equality Scheme to pursue every avenue with the owners of such property to meet their obligations under the Disability Discrimination Act and, in conjunction with the Equality Commission, to see that every elector can access the electoral system fully and without hindrance. Fortunately, most property owners recognise the need to provide proper access for disabled people throughout the year and it is an issue which becomes less problematic with every passing month. The EONI looks forward to the time when easy access for disabled people is the norm for every public building.

7. ELECTORAL FRAUD

The effects of the Electoral Fraud (Northern Ireland) Act 2002 continued to be apparent. The Electoral Commission regard the Northern Ireland Electoral Register as very accurate. This is in great part due to the introduction of individual registration and the need for each elector to supply the three personal identifiers which can be checked against the DWP national insurance number database. These factors, coupled with the EONI computer system implemented in 2002 which is capable of detailed analysis of the records of all electors, including holding the scanned images of registration and absent voting application forms, has meant that the opportunity for fraud is greatly reduced. In addition, the need for specific photographic identity to be produced by all electors voting at polling stations has almost entirely removed the opportunity for personation. The EONI is of the view that elections in Northern Ireland are probably the most secure (and as a consequence, probably the most fair) in any developed democracy.

8. ADVICE TO THE SECRETARY OF STATE

The CEO, together with senior colleagues, met Ministers on a number of occasions during the year to discuss important electoral matters. Moreover, senior officials from the Northern Ireland Office were in frequent contact, seeking advice and comment from the EONI on a range of electoral issues. Information and guidance were provided promptly (and the EONI believes on a comprehensive and considered basis). A good working relationship existed between the EONI and Ministers throughout the year and with all levels of staff in the Northern Ireland Office.

9. THE BOUNDARY COMMISSION

The Parliamentary Boundary Commission continued sitting throughout the year looking at electorate change since the last recommendations were made in 1995 and how this might affect the number and dimension of Parliamentary constituencies in Northern Ireland. As an assessor to the Commission the CEO supplied registration and other data as required; deliberations and public consultations are, however, likely to take some time to complete.

10. INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

Throughout the year a number of hardware and software enhancements were made to the computer system to meet the needs of the EONI.

The upgrades undertaken related to:

- a. **Storage Area Network (SAN) Capacity.** Disc capacity used to hold the Register database and the associated images of the scanned forms had to be increased as part of a planned upgrade.
- b. **Backup and Restore Capacity.** It was necessary to migrate to a new library system to ensure all backups could be completed in a shorter and more manageable timeframe.
- c. **Server and PC hardware and software upgrades.** There was an upgrade to Windows 2003 server and Windows XP because Windows 2000 support ended on March 31 2005. Also, there was an upgrade to TFT monitors because of the better definition needed to view the detail of scanned forms.
- d. **Electoral Registration System.** Two software components had to be replaced for which support was no longer available.
- e. **Security systems.** Part of the system had to be replaced for which support was no longer available.

A project was undertaken to implement an internet protocol telephony system utilising the computer network, with a view to freeing up Area Office staff from answering routine queries during the peak periods of the annual canvass and elections, by introducing a customer information centre based in St Anne's House. The project was successfully completed in preparation for the May 2005 elections and provided a greatly enhanced facility for electors in the run up to the election.

11. STAFFING

The staffing complement (permanent and contract) remained constant throughout 2004-05 at 46 full-time equivalent posts. However, there were changes to key personnel which added to the usual difficulties of conducting registration and elections. Two Area Electoral Officers, in Belfast and Newtownabbey, resigned during the year. They were replaced through internal reorganisation and recruitment of a new officer for Belfast. The Human Resources Officer also left during 2004-05 and a replacement was recruited later in year. All appointments were made through open competition.

12. FUNDING AND EXPENDITURE

12.1 Funding

The operating costs of the EONI, which cover all activities related to registration as well as the general administration expenses associated with maintaining the organisation and the office estate, are met from the Estimate of the Northern Ireland Office. Expenditure on elections is funded by HM Treasury through the Northern Ireland Office. Expenditure at any election is governed by the Fees and Charges Order approved by Parliament for that election and all legitimate expenditure within these limits is met. The Secretary of State and the Permanent Under Secretary of State at the Northern Ireland Office account to Parliament for all expenditure by the EONI.

The funds made available to the EONI in 2004-05 were in the end sufficient to deliver all the CEO's statutory functions to a satisfactory level. It was, however, the case that delays in finalising funding for the year resulted in uncertainty such that the business plan for 2004-05 could not be completed until the last quarter and consequently was not published as had been planned. Nevertheless, a comprehensive canvass was conducted in autumn 2004 and this was supplemented with outreach programmes aimed at increasing registration, particularly among young people. Funding also catered for three programmes of mobile site visits allowing electors to apply for the Electoral Identity Card at various locations throughout the Province as well as at the permanent application centres in each of the Area Offices. The first was organised during the 2004 canvass and the other two in advance of the European Parliamentary elections of June 2004. On the capital side, the EONI was able to increase the efficiency of operations by upgrading the computer system which maintains the Register and is fundamental to the administration of elections as well as supporting office's general administration.

12.2 Expenditure in 2004-05

The CEO has no statutory duty to prepare formal accounts. Expenditure by the EONI is accounted for in the annual accounts of the Northern Ireland Office which are subject to audit by the National Audit Office. However, the EONI's operations and systems are subject to independent internal audit, the reports of which are made available to the Department. In light of this report and other internal control mechanisms the CEO provided the Northern Ireland Office Accounting Officer with a statement of assurance about the use of resources in 2004-05. Expenditure for the year was as follows: (including the 2004 annual canvass, but excluding the cost of the European Parliamentary election which is funded directly by HM Treasury).

	£K	£K
Pay – Permanent staff	834	
Pay – Temporary staff	1028	
Costs of the EONI office estate	418	
Printing and Stationery	126	
Postage	160	
ID Card	134	
Capital Expenditure	329	
Other costs	415	
	3444	
Receipts		196
TOTAL		3248

The European Elections - June 2004

	£K
Pay and costs – Poll, Count & Temporary Administrative staff	835
Postage	143
Other (including Hire of Premises)	408
Postage – Candidates addresses	613
TOTAL	1999

13. EFFICIENCY AND EFFECTIVENESS

13.1 The Constant Search for Improvement

The EONI constantly seeks to improve electoral service and to utilise resources as efficiently and effectively as possible. The EONI's Change Programme examined all aspects of electoral administration in order to identify options for better and more efficient ways of working. The Change Programme is aimed at delivering improvements across all aspects of corporate management and planning. It also takes account of current Government initiatives for improving performance. Throughout the year EONI staff kept in regular contact with electoral administrators in Great Britain and in the Republic of Ireland in order to take full account of best practice, including that promulgated by the Electoral Commission. The CEO continued as a member of the Commission's Electoral Leadership Forum and of the Solace Electoral Matters Panel. He and senior colleagues are members of the Association of Electoral Administrators (the professional body whose role is to promote best practice across the United Kingdom) and all take an active part in Association work. The CEO regularly has discussions on a range of electoral matters with officials of the Northern Ireland Office, the Department for Constitutional Affairs and the Chairman, Commissioners and staff of the Electoral Commission.

13.2 Reform of Electoral Registration

In late 2004 the CEO conveyed to Ministers the view that the annual canvass is no longer an effective or efficient way to maintain the Electoral Register for Northern Ireland. There was evidence that the Register was falling year on year and would continue to do so unless specific action was taken to arrest the decline. The EONI

was concerned that current legislation was contributing to the problem. Moreover, while the level of registration was at risk there was a significant part of the eligible electorate which persistently remained unregistered. The administrative burden of renewing the Register annually had a limiting effect on the EONI's capacity to deal with this deficit. The EONI was also anxious to ensure that the measures in place to counter absent voting fraud and other malpractices remained effective and that they were sufficient to contend efficiently with the perceived risks

The EONI examined alternative methodologies to the annual canvass drawing on models for electoral registration employed in other major first world democracies. It assessed the impact of adopting different approaches on the completeness, integrity and accuracy of the Register and the potential for associated electoral fraud. As a consequence, the EONI concluded that there is a viable option for change which should halt the decline in the Register, ensure an acceptable level of accuracy, reduce the cost of registration and encourage an increase in the size of the Register in future years. Having reviewed the present arrangements to prevent and detect fraud and malpractice in absent voting, the EONI considered them to be sufficient, bearing in mind that to make them more secure or more efficient would be disproportionate to the perceived level of risk.

The EONI therefore made the following recommendations to Ministers in 2004:

- a. The legal requirement for an annual canvass should be removed.
- b. The final annual canvass should be that to be carried out in autumn 2005.
- c. The Register published at 1 December 2005 should be as complete as possible by encouraging the Electoral Commission to undertake an extensive advertising campaign, emphasising the long-term nature of the new Register, and by conducting an extensive outreach programme along with the 2005 canvass.
- d. Using new legislation where necessary, automated data transfer arrangements should be put in place to provide the EONI with information;
 - i about all domestic premises in Northern Ireland,
 - ii young people becoming eligible for registration,
 - iii people moving house, and,
 - iv people changing their name.

held by the Northern Ireland Housing Executive, Valuation and Lands Agency, Driver Vehicle Licensing NI, Rates Collection Agency, District Councils, the new water authority, the Register General, the Social Security Agency, HM Revenue and Customs, the UK Passport Service, the Court Service, the Stamp Office and education authorities.

- e. Using the information obtained from these sources, the EONI should extend and keep the Register up to date by contacting:
 - i all eligible and newly eligible electors who are not registered,
 - ii all electors who have moved house or changed their name, using targeted mailing and, when necessary, doorstep visits, and,
 - iii remove from the Register all deceased electors and those known to have left Northern Ireland or who fail to confirm their circumstances when requested by the EONI.

- f. The EONI should conduct regular awareness and publicity programmes in conjunction with the Electoral Commission.
- g. Electors, when they apply to register, should be required to provide the three personal identifiers in line with current legislation.
- h. The accuracy of the Register should be determined by statistical survey at regular intervals.
- i. The electorate should be canvassed at the discretion of the CEO in consultation with the Secretary of State when the CEO is of the view that the Register has reached an unacceptable level of inaccuracy.

Ministers announced in November 2004 that the Government had accepted the shortcomings of the present Northern Ireland registration system and gave a commitment to move away from the legal requirement for the Register to be completed refreshed each year. The Rt Hon John Spellar MP, the then Minister of State at the Northern Ireland Office, said that he believed such a move would reduce the burden on the individual citizen and allow the resources of the EONI to be redirected towards targeting those groups where rates of registration are low.

14. EQUALITY

The EONI has implemented an Equality Scheme approved by the Equality Commission. The Scheme demonstrates the EONI's commitment to the fulfilment of its obligations under section 75 of the Northern Ireland Act 1998, which is the promotion of equality of opportunity and of good relations.

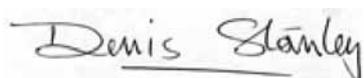
During the year the EONI addressed a number of general and particular duties deriving from the Scheme. Special attention was paid to ensuring that adequate resources were provided to allow proper compliance with the Scheme and that effective internal arrangements were in place to fulfil its duties under the Scheme and that progress was monitored and reviewed throughout the year. More particularly, the EONI continued to deliver the planned programme of communication and training on this Scheme for staff. In addition, in line with the agreed plan in the Scheme for review, all the policies, powers, duties and functions of the CEO as they are implemented by the EONI were examined. In addition to completing and publishing a comprehensive Equality Impact Assessment (EQIA) of the Polling Station Scheme, the EONI also embarked on an EQIA of Electoral Registration.

15. ADMINISTRATIVE TARGETS

The EONI set the following administrative targets.

Target	Outcome
Financial management	
To manage the workload in 200-05 within a running costs budget (to cover salaries and administrative expenditure) to financial limits agreed with the Northern Ireland Office (including in-year adjustments).	Achieved.
To maintain accounting system to ensure that it meets the needs of Parliament, Ministers, the Northern Ireland Office and the EONI.	Achieved.
To maintain a financial fraud prevention culture at all levels.	Achieved.
To arrange an internal audit contract and implement an internal audit programme.	Achieved.
To review the EONI financial delegations, by December 2004.	Achieved.
To prepare a draft Corporate Plan for 2005-2008 and a draft Annual Business Plan for 2005-06 by March 2005.	Achieved although not completed by March 2005 due to priority having to be given to preparation for major elections.
Quality of Service	
To reply to at least 95% of letters within 10 working days of receipt	Achieved.
To attend to callers at any EONI location within five minutes.	Achieved.
To acknowledge at least 95% of Rolling Registration claims within three working days from the date of the relevant hearing.	Achieved.
To respond to telephone enquiries on the same day or at the latest within 24 hours.	Achieved.
To reply, within seven working days, to those who raise matters of concern with the CEO. (In exceptional cases when an interim reply is necessary, a full reply will be issued within 10 days).	Achieved.
To provide timely and appropriate information to the press, community groups and individuals who have an interest in the work of the EONI. This will continue to be done by way of press briefings, media interviews and presentations to community groups. Individuals who approach the EONI for information will be answered in person, by telephone or letter, as appropriate.	Achieved.
To provide clear and straightforward information about EONI service in simple textual format, (similarly in Braille, in large type and on tape cassette for those with sight difficulties) and provide a central telephone enquiry point.	Achieved.
To continue to operate the Complaints procedures and to send out information about the procedure upon request.	Achieved.
To conduct planned Equality Impact Assessments.	Achieved.

Target	Outcome
Human Resources	
To keep under review pay and grading arrangements to ensure that they meet the needs and circumstances which are likely to obtain throughout the year.	Achieved.
To keep under review staffing levels to ensure they are consistent with the volume of work.	Achieved.
To manage absenteeism with the aim of ensuring that the average level for the year is no higher than 4%.	Achieved.
To conduct meetings with trade union representatives in accordance with the established EONI/trade union arrangements.	Achieved.
To conduct regular reviews of health and safety matters, and arrange training as appropriate.	Achieved.
To monitor the completion and updating of Personal Development Plans throughout the year.	Achieved.
To continue induction and job-related training for all staff.	Achieved.
To computerise the training records of all staff.	Achieved.
Internal Communications	
To maintain the system of monthly Team Leaders' meetings.	Achieved.
Information Systems	
To address the requirements for Freedom of Information Legislation by a. creating and publishing a Publication Scheme b. formulating an information policy and strategy for the EONI, and c. implementing an electronic records management system.	Achieved for a. and b. An electronic records management system is to be installed in autumn 2005.
To review by March 2005 the EONI contingency plans in the event of a major disruption at St Anne's House.	Not achieved due to pressures of election work.



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