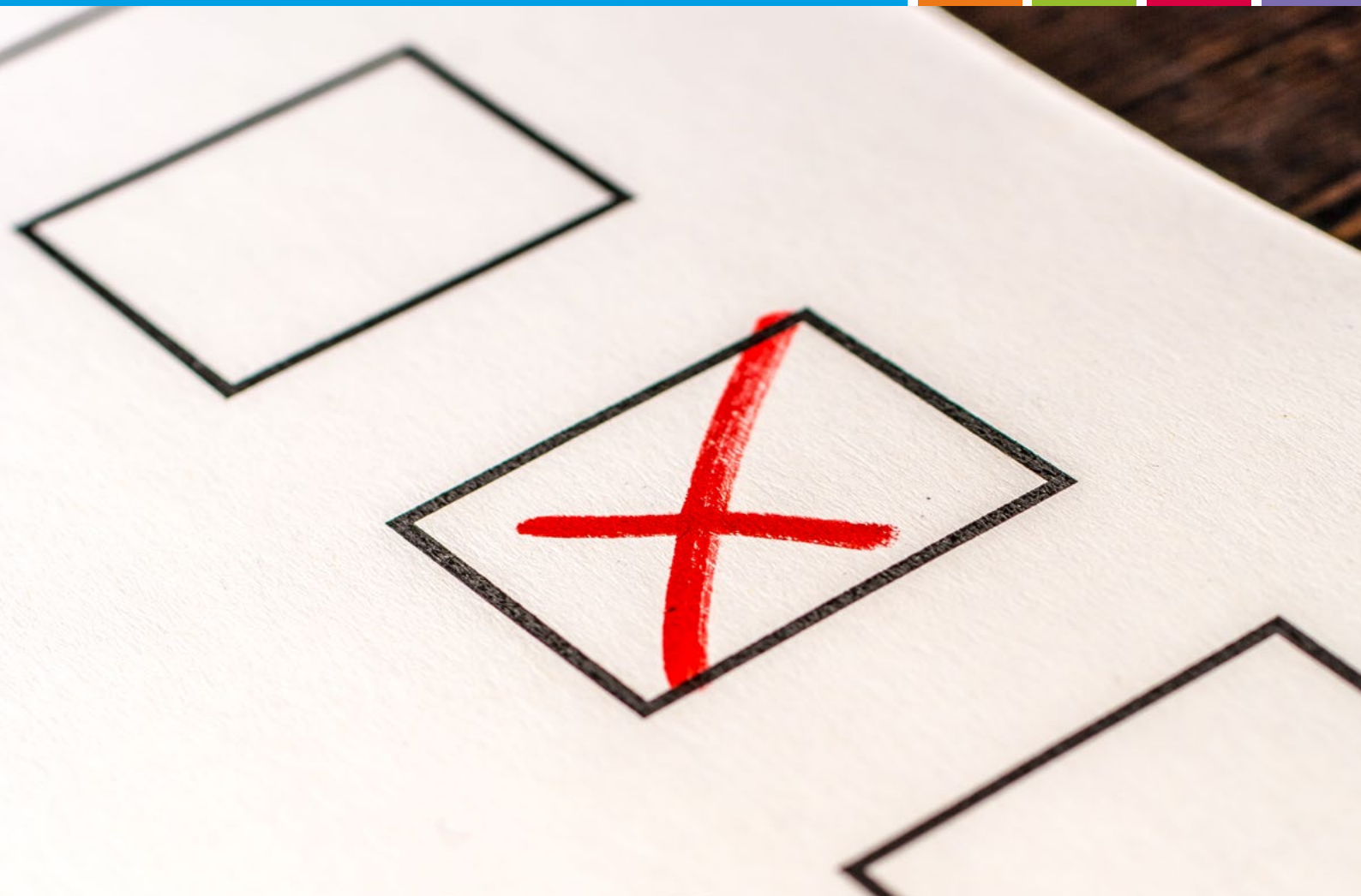


Anonymous Registration on the Electoral Register in the UK

Second edition

CLINICAL PROFESSIONAL RESOURCE





Publication

This is an RCN practice guidance. Practice guidance are evidence-based consensus documents, used to guide decisions about appropriate care of an individual, family or population in a specific context.

Description

This updated guidance is aimed at nurses and midwives, who may be supporting victims of domestic abuse or related safeguarding issues, to register to vote anonymously in elections.

Publication date: July 2020 Review date: July 2023

The Nine Quality Standards

This publication has met the nine quality standards of the quality framework for RCN professional publications. For more information, or to request further details on how the nine quality standards have been met in relation to this particular professional publication, please contact publicationsfeedback@rcn.org.uk

Evaluation

The authors would value any feedback you have about this publication. Please contact publicationsfeedback@rcn.org.uk clearly stating which publication you are commenting on.

RCN Legal Disclaimer

This publication contains information, advice and guidance to help members of the RCN. It is intended for use within the UK but readers are advised that practices may vary in each country and outside the UK.

The information in this booklet has been compiled from professional sources, but its accuracy is not guaranteed. Whilst every effort has been made to ensure the RCN provides accurate and expert information and guidance, it is impossible to predict all the circumstances in which it may be used. Accordingly, the RCN shall not be liable to any person or entity with respect to any loss or damage caused or alleged to be caused directly or indirectly by what is contained in or left out of this website information and guidance.

Published by the Royal College of Nursing, 20 Cavendish Square, London, W1G 0RN

© 2020 Royal College of Nursing. All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted in any form or by any means electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without prior permission of the Publishers. This publication may not be lent, resold, hired out or otherwise disposed of by ways of trade in any form of binding or cover other than that in which it is published, without the prior consent of the Publishers.

Background

In order to vote in UK elections, citizens need to ensure they are registered to vote by providing personal details to their local electoral registration officer (ERO). There are those who, for a range of reasons, (including victims of domestic abuse) may miss out on voting because they are concerned that perpetrators will be able to trace them by searching the electoral register for their new address.

Prior to 2017, the main means of becoming anonymous on the published electoral register was via a court order. In order to make this right more accessible legislation was introduced to enable individuals to apply to a court, using an attestation statement supported by a registered health practitioner (to sign a form attesting to their right, for reasons of safety, to have anonymity).

Legislation:

The Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 (March 2018)

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2018/312/contents/made

The Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

www.legislation.gov.uk/ukxi/2018/331/pdfs/ukxi_20180331_en.pdf

The Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2018

www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2018/9780111038000

All voters are required to provide personal information to their local ERO to enable confirmation of their eligibility to register to vote. The difference between a standard and an anonymous registration is how these details appear on the electoral register. This new legislation enables individuals to register to vote anonymously so that they can vote without their name and address appearing on the electoral register and can be sure that their personal details will be kept confidential.

RCN position

The RCN supports the need for all individuals to be able to contribute to society, and this includes an individual's right and access to register to vote. We recognise that health care professionals may be ideally suited to supporting victims of domestic abuse in achieving this basic right, however we are clear that all nurses and midwives must be suitably trained to feel confident and competent to complete the duties required of their registration.

The RCN recommends that nurses and midwives are confident that they are aware of the person's circumstances in order to qualify for this exemption. If attesting, the registrant should have clinical evidence to support their decision to attest.

The RCN also takes this opportunity to remind all registrants of their responsibilities for safeguarding and the protection of vulnerable groups (PVG) and acting on any concerns they have about an individual who may be at risk. If a nurse or midwife has any concerns they should follow local safeguarding/PVG procedures and contact their safeguarding/PVG lead, as necessary. The local **Independent Domestic Violence Advisor (IDVA)** or **Domestic Abuse Advocacy (IDAA) in Scotland** or equivalent may be the most appropriate person to contact.

The nurse/midwife registrant will be required to provide their name and place of work, as well as their right to be an attester (ie, nurse/midwife) but no NMC number is required).

There is no mandatory expectation on registrants to complete an attestation form.

What is anonymous registration?

Anonymous registration was set up to help individuals whose safety would be at risk (or where the safety of other people at the same address as them would be at risk) if their name or address was listed on the electoral register – for example a person who has fled domestic abuse (Woman's Aid, 2018).

How registering anonymously works

All voters are required to give basic personal information to their local ERO so that they can check that they are eligible to register to vote. The difference between a standard and an anonymous registration is how these details then appear on the electoral register and how the ERO communicates with the individual (Woman's Aid, 2018).

What is an attestation?

An **attestation** is a statement that if the applicant's name and address were on the register, the applicant or another member of the household's safety would be at risk. Attestations must be in writing and must be signed and dated by the qualifying officer (nurse/midwife) who must specify a period between one and five years for which it has effect.

The form to be completed, developed by the ERO, requires the nurse/midwife to attest:

"I certify that the safety of the applicant and any person (s) named above of the same household, would be at risk if the register contained the name or qualifying address of the applicant."

How does an individual make an application to register anonymously?

To register anonymously the individual will need to complete an **anonymous registration application form**. They will need to explain briefly why their safety (or the safety of someone in the same household as them) would be at risk if their name and address appeared on the electoral register (for example, they fear that any disclosure of their address could increase their risk). They also need to provide documentary evidence to support their application, comprising of either:

1. a court order
2. an attestation by a qualifying officer.

The application must then be submitted to the ERO at the local council.

Who is a qualifying officer who can sign the attestation?

A qualifying officer can be any of the following (anywhere in the UK):

- a refuge manager
- a registered medical practitioner eg, GP
- a registered nurse or midwife
- a police officer of or above the rank of inspector in any police force in the UK
- the Director General of the Security Services
- or the National Crime Agency
- a director of adult social services or children's services in England
- a director of social services in Wales
- a chief social worker in Scotland (who may authorise in writing another person to attest an application for a person aged under 16)
- a director of social services of a health and social services board or an executive director of social work of a health and social services trust in Northern Ireland.

Only the individuals named as qualifying officers in the list above are permitted to attest anonymous registration applications. Qualifying officers for anonymous registration applications are set out in law which means that the ERO has no discretion to be flexible about who may attest an application.

The attestation cannot be delegated from a qualifying officer to a more junior member of staff in the organisation.

This guidance reflects the anonymous registration system, including the changes introduced in the Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018, the Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2018 and the Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) Amendment Regulations 2018.

For further information about anonymous registration please visit:

www.electoralcommission.org.uk
(search anonymous registration)

References and further information

The Representation of the People (England and Wales) (Amendment) Regulations 2018
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/312/contents/made

The Representation of the People (Northern Ireland) (Amendment) Regulations 2018
www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2018/331/pdfs/uksi_20180331_en.pdf

The Representation of the People (Scotland) (Amendment) Regulations 2018
www.legislation.gov.uk/sdsi/2018/9780111038000

The Electoral Commission (2018) Register to vote anonymously (web). Available at:
www.yourvotematters.co.uk/register-to-vote/register-to-vote-anonymously

Women's Aid (2018) Anonymous registration for survivors of domestic abuse
www.womensaid.org.uk/what-we-do/campaigning-and-influencing/campaign-with-us/right-to-vote

Royal College of Midwives *Anonymous voter registration in the UK: Supporting survivors of domestic abuse to register to vote* (web). Available at: www.rcm.org.uk/search-results/?query=anonymous+registration&page=1

Royal College of Nursing Clinical pages on domestic abuse (web). Available at: www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/domestic-violence-and-abuse and www.rcn.org.uk/clinical-topics/domestic-violence-and-abuse/covid-19-and-domestic-abuse

SafeLives Professional training support available at: <https://safelives.org.uk/knowledge-hub>

RCN Member Support Services available at:

www.rcn.org.uk/get-help/member-support-services or call on 0345 772 6100.

The RCN represents nurses and nursing, promotes
excellence in practice and shapes health policies

RCN Online
www.rcn.org.uk

RCN Direct
www.rcn.org.uk/direct
0345 772 6100

Published by the Royal College of Nursing
20 Cavendish Square
London
W1G 0RN

020 7409 3333

July 2020
Publication code 009 299



Royal College
of Nursing