

Situations and procedures

UK Parliamentary general election 2015: Hustings

This document is for non-party campaigners who want to know good practice for holding hustings and when hustings may be regulated.

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Translations and other formats

For information on obtaining this publication in another language or in a large-print or Braille version please contact the Electoral Commission:

Tel: 020 7271 0500

Email: publications@electoralcommission.org.uk

Terms and expressions we use

You will normally be doing enough to comply with the law if you follow this guidance.

We use '**must**' when we refer to a specific requirement. We use '**should**' for items we consider to be minimum good practice, but which are not legal or regulatory requirements

Our approach to enforcement

The Commission regulates political funding and spending. We are committed to providing those we regulate with a clear understanding of their regulatory obligations through our guidance documents and advice service.

Wherever possible, we use advice and guidance proactively in order to secure compliance. And we regulate in a way that is effective, proportionate and fair.

If you do not comply with legal or regulatory requirements you or your organisation may be subject to civil or criminal sanctions. You can find more information about the Commission's approach to enforcement at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/party-finance/enforcement

Hustings

Who this document is for:

Non-party campaigners who want to understand when hustings may be regulated and the rules they may need to follow.

The document covers:

- An introduction to hustings
- What is a hustings
- Non-selective hustings
- Selective hustings

Related documents:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
 - [Registering as a non-party campaigner](#)
 - [Overview of non-party regulated campaign activity](#)
 - [UK Parliamentary general election: Constituency campaigning](#)
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Summary

Hustings provide a forum for members of the public to hear from candidates and political parties.

Under PPERA, spending on hustings may be regulated depending on how it is organised. This document provides a guide to hustings, explains when they may be regulated by us and gives an overview of the rules you may need to follow.

Introduction

Non-party campaigners are individuals or organisations that campaign in the run-up to elections, but are not standing as political parties or candidates.

In electoral law, these individuals or organisations are called 'third parties'. Where non-party campaigners have registered with the Electoral Commission they are called 'recognised third parties'. In our guidance, we call recognised third parties 'registered non-party campaigners'.

The Political Parties Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) sets out the rules that non-party campaigners must follow if:

- they spend money on certain regulated campaign activities, including public events, that can reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against political parties or categories of candidates, including political parties or categories of candidates who support or oppose particular policies or issues, and
- the spending is incurred during the regulated period, which is the period when the rules on spending and donations apply. The regulated period for the UK Parliamentary general election 2015 starts on **19 September 2014** and ends on polling day, **7 May 2015**.

In many cases, spending on hustings will **not** be regulated under PERA. This is because an impartial hustings will not reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters.

However, in some cases hustings will reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters. This may happen where you selectively invite or exclude candidates or parties. In such cases, the rules on non-party campaigning will apply to you.

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Hustings

What is a hustings?

A hustings is a meeting where election candidates or parties debate policies and answer questions from the audience. Hustings provide voters with an opportunity to hear the views of candidates or parties.

A hustings can be what we call a 'national hustings' or a 'local hustings':

- a **national hustings** is a hustings that involves representatives of the various political parties
- a **local hustings** is a hustings that involves the candidates standing in a particular constituency

Hustings are usually held by organisations, such as community groups or non-party campaigners, so that voters can ask candidates or party representatives about issues that are important to them.

What hustings are not regulated?

A non-selective hustings is a hustings that would not reasonably be regarded as intended to influence voters to vote for or against political parties or categories of candidates, including political parties or categories of candidates who support or oppose particular policies or issues.

If you are holding a non-selective hustings, it will not be regulated by the non-party campaigning rules in PPERA.

In our view, a hustings will be non-selective if:

- the organiser of a local hustings has invited all the candidates known to be standing in the constituency
- the organiser of a national hustings has invited all the parties campaigning in the election
- you have impartial reasons for not inviting certain candidates or parties or
- the event will only be open to members of the organisation holding the event and it is not made available to the public

The organiser does not have to ensure that all candidates or parties attend the event. They just need to be invited.

If you are holding a public hustings, and you want to ensure that it is a non-selective hustings, the simplest way is to invite all the relevant candidates in the area or all political parties campaigning in the election, and allow all those attending an equal opportunity to participate.

However, this may not always be practical. For example, there may be so many candidates or parties standing that a meeting would be hard to manage.

If you decide not to invite all candidates, there are some good practice recommendations you should follow to ensure your hustings is genuinely not promoting particular candidates or parties more than others.

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Good practice recommendations

To show your hustings is non-selective you should:

- be able to give impartial reasons why you have not invited particular candidates or parties. You should be prepared to explain your reasons to candidates or parties you haven't invited
- make sure that candidates or parties you invite represent a reasonable variety of view, from different parts of the political spectrum
- allow each candidate or party representative attending a fair chance to answer questions and, where appropriate, a reasonable opportunity to respond to points made against them by other candidates or party representative
- inform the audience at the meeting of candidates or parties standing who haven't been invited.

If you are a charity, you should also follow the Charity Commission's guidance on campaigning.

Impartial reasons may emerge from the following considerations:

- local prominence of some parties or candidates over others
- the number of elected representatives at the local or national level
- recent election results in the area
- resources and other practicalities constraining numbers of invitees
- security concerns

Impartial reasons do not include reasons such as your views on the policies of a candidate or party.

Selective hustings

In the regulated period for the UK Parliamentary general election, spending on a hustings will be regulated by us if you:

- selectively invite candidates or parties to your hustings and do not have impartial reasons for doing so, and
- the public are invited to attend the hustings

If you hold a members' only selective hustings that you invite the media to, this will usually be regulated.

If you only invite your members or committed supporters to your hustings, and don't publicly broadcast the hustings, it will not be a selective hustings.

What rules apply to selective hustings?

Spending on a selective hustings is regulated campaign activity and will be treated as a public event.

There are rules on how much non-party campaigners can spend on regulated campaign activity and when non-party campaigners must register with us. As an overview:

- if you spend, or plan to spend, more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity during a regulated period, including on the selective hustings, you must register with us as a registered non-party campaigner
- if you do not register, or you are not eligible to register, you cannot spend more than £20,000 in England or £10,000 in any of Scotland, Wales or Northern Ireland on regulated campaign activity during a regulated period
- if you register with us, you will have a higher spending limit and there are rules you must follow on donations, spending and reporting

If you are spending on regulated campaign activity you can find further information at:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Overview of non-party regulated campaign activity](#)
- [Registering as a non-party campaigner](#)
- [Managing non-party campaign spending](#)

Selective local hustings and the limit on spending in each constituency

During the regulated period for the UK Parliamentary general election, there are rules on how much you can spend in a particular parliamentary constituency. The maximum amount a registered or unregistered non-party campaigner can spend on regulated campaign activity in a particular parliamentary

constituency is £9,750. For more information please see the [Overview of focused constituency campaigning](#).

If you are holding a selective local hustings, we will treat this as influencing the voting choice of the people in a particular constituency or constituencies and therefore the constituency limits will apply to you. We call regulated campaign activity that influences the voting choice of the people in a particular constituency or constituencies 'focused constituency campaigning'.

But if you think that your selective local hustings is not constituency based, please contact us for advice.

If you are a registered non-party campaigner and you spend the whole £9,750 on focused constituency campaigning in a particular constituency you will breach the constituency spending limit in that constituency if you then spend anything on any other regulated campaign activity that must be attributed to that constituency. For more information please see [Managing non-party campaign spending](#).

If you think you may carry out a combination of focused constituency spending and any other regulated campaign spending you should read the guidance below for more information:

- [Overview of non-party campaigns](#)
- [Overview of focused constituency campaigning](#)
- [Managing non-party campaign spending](#)
- [UK Parliamentary general election 2015: Non-party campaigners](#)

Candidate or party spending

In some cases the candidate or party will have to account for the spending incurred in respect of a selective hustings. This will be the case where the candidate or party is actually incurring the spending, or is making use of spending provided by others. If you think this may be the case, you should contact us before you hold the hustings.

How we can help

You can find more information in the guidance documents we have suggested in this document, or you can view our full range of guidance and up-to-date resources on our website.

You can contact us on one of the phone numbers or email addresses below. We are here to help, so please get in touch.

Call us on:

- England: 020 7271 0616
pef@electoralcommission.org.uk
- Scotland: 0131 225 0200
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Visit us at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

We welcome feedback on our guidance – just email us at: pef@electoralcommission.org.uk