



Department for Levelling Up,
Housing & Communities

Electoral Integrity Programme

Election matters: Introducing the new digital imprints regime

17 October 2023



Rationale for the policy

Key factors:

- Unprecedented changes to political campaigning methods over the past decades
- New technologies and communication channels available to campaigners and voters
- A regulatory framework that only applies to offline election (etc) material

Impact:

- ➔ Increasing reliance on digital political campaigning to communicate with voters
- ➔ Democratisation of political campaigning
- ➔ Campaigners' messages can reach wider/new audiences more effectively
- ➔ **Lack of transparency**



Increasing transparency for voters

Objectives:

- Providing voters with comparable – if not greater – levels of transparency between offline and digital political campaigning
- Creating a regime that is comprehensive and able to keep up with future technological developments
- Balancing the need for transparency with the need to minimise burdens on campaigners and members of the public
- Creating a regime that is effectively enforceable



Public consultations

- The Government ran two public consultations on the policy:
 - July-October 2018, [*Protecting the Debate: Intimidation, Influence and Information*](#)
 - August-November 2020, [*Transparency in digital campaigning - Technical consultation on digital imprints*](#)
- [Government response](#) to the second consultation - published in June 2021
- Overall, feedback to the consultation was positive, with solid majorities in favour of most of the proposals. Respondents said the regime would:
 - improve public confidence in campaigning,
 - help to close a gap in transparency, and
 - aid oversight and enforcement on the part of regulators and civil society.



Policy timeline

- Elections Bill, June 2021 ==> Part 6 of the Elections Act 2022, May 2022 introduced the UK Government's new digital imprint regime
- The regime will come into force on 1 November 2023 alongside the statutory guidance for the regime drafted by the Electoral Commission
- The regime will apply across the UK, regardless of where in the world content is promoted from
- For the most part, the regime will also apply all year round
- May be amended in the future to keep up with technological developments



Example digital imprint





Scope of the regime

- The regime has two sides:
 - A **paid-for** side that applies to a broad range of digital material considered to be a ‘paid advert’ for the purpose of the regime. The **rules for paid adverts apply to everybody**.
 - An **organic** side that only applies to other types of digital material (broadly similar to the rules for print imprints) and specific political entities, **including elected office holders**.
- Paid-for side: Campaigners will **not** need to include a digital imprint simply for expressing themselves online (e.g. in a tweet), even during a campaign. They will have to include an imprint in digital material **only if** they are paying to advertise this material (e.g. boosting).
- Organic side: The regime avoids placing an undue burden on members of the public expressing their political opinions online organically.



Enforcement of the regime

- The regime will be jointly enforced by the Electoral Commission and the police/courts.
- The statutory guidance will play a key part in enabling campaigners to understand and comply with the rules.
- The regime also includes powers for the enforcement authorities to:
 - require from digital platforms that material found to be in breach of the rules be removed or access to it disabled ('take-down power')
 - require information from any person or organisation (including digital platforms) that is reasonably required for the enforcement of the regime (e.g. requesting information about a deleted social media post)
- **Breaching the digital imprint rules is a criminal offence.**



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Thank you for your attention

Any questions?