

PRESS RELEASE

ENGAGEMENT WITH KEY STAKEHOLDERS ON VOTING ARRANGEMENTS TO IMPROVE VOTING ACCESSIBILITY

As earlier announced in Parliament, the Elections Department (ELD) will be seeking feedback from political parties, nursing home operators and overseas Singaporeans on the introduction of two new voting arrangements to improve voting accessibility during elections, namely special voting arrangements for voters residing at some nursing homes and postal voting for overseas Singaporeans. ELD will also be organising focus group discussions on these new voting arrangements.

2 Proposals on these new voting arrangements can be found in the factsheet attached in the [Annex](#).

3 Feedback received from the engagement exercise will be considered before ELD finalises its recommendations.

**ISSUED BY
ELECTIONS DEPARTMENT
PRIME MINISTER'S OFFICE**

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Voting Arrangements to Improve Voting Accessibility

Introduction

1 The Elections Department (ELD) is engaging relevant stakeholders on the introduction of two new voting arrangements – namely special voting arrangements for voters residing at some nursing homes and postal voting for overseas Singaporeans. The aim is to improve voting accessibility for these voters.

Background

2 ELD regularly reviews our election processes to improve the voting experience for Singaporeans. General Election 2020 (GE2020), which was held amidst the COVID-19 pandemic, highlighted two key issues in the electoral landscape.

3 First, the electorate is ageing rapidly – 21% of Singapore Citizens in the Registers of Electors for GE2020 were aged 65 and above, compared to 14% in GE2011. While we have enhanced voting accessibility over the years by increasing the number of polling stations, among other initiatives¹, ELD continues to explore how we can further enhance voting accessibility for elderly voters.

4 Second, many overseas Singaporeans remain engaged with Singapore and are keen to exercise their vote. Since the introduction of overseas voting at GE2006, overseas polling stations have been the only means for overseas Singaporeans to cast their votes. This is because voting by paper ballot at polling stations is a transparent and secure method of voting that ensures the integrity of the voting process and secrecy of votes. However, ELD recognises that it may not be possible for some overseas Singaporeans to travel to these overseas polling stations to vote. For example, the pandemic has highlighted how travel restrictions can make it difficult for some overseas Singaporeans to travel to the overseas polling stations to vote. Other travel restrictions and impediments to access these overseas polling stations may occur during future elections, even outside of a pandemic.

5 In view of the above, ELD is considering introducing (a) special arrangements for voters residing at some nursing homes to improve voting accessibility for them, and (b) postal voting for overseas Singaporeans.

¹ For example, designated drop-off points with barrier-free access are provided at polling stations to facilitate the easy movement of voters with mobility challenges. Our election officials are also trained to assist these voters.

(a) Special arrangements for voters residing at some nursing homes (pilot)

6 ELD proposes to pilot an initiative to enable elderly voters in some nursing homes to cast their votes in the nursing home where they are residing so that they do not have to travel to their assigned polling stations to vote. This is similar to what was done at GE2020 for voters serving Stay-Home Notice at designated hotels, where arrangements were made to enable affected voters to cast their votes at their hotel rooms.

Potential challenges due to the operating context and environment of nursing homes

7 Profile of the residents across nursing homes vary widely in terms of their physical health (from being mobile to bedbound) and mental health (from mentally alert to non-lucid). Consequently, the assistance that needs to be rendered for each resident to vote can be very different.

8 Involvement of nursing home staff to physically assist voters to vote. As nursing home staff provide direct care to their residents on a daily basis, we are likely to have to rely on them to assist residents who are eligible to vote to do so. Concerns about the risks of residents being influenced by nursing home staff, who may be local or foreign, may arise.

Proposed arrangement

9 To better cater to residents in nursing homes, ELD is planning to pilot this special voting arrangement at some nursing homes for a start. ELD will finalise the criteria for the selection of nursing homes in the pilot after consulting the political parties and nursing homes. The possible criteria may include the profile and number of voters residing in nursing homes. ELD is considering:

a) **Setting up an on-site polling station within the nursing homes' premises such as in the foyer or hall.** Voters who are mobile will make their way to the on-site polling station to cast their votes. Voting at the on-site polling station will be similar to voting at regular polling stations in Singapore;

and/or

b) **Deploying a mobile team to bring the ballot box and ballot papers from bed to bed to enable voters to cast their votes at their beds.** Depending on the size and physical layout of the nursing homes, a few mobile teams may be deployed at any one time.

(b) Postal voting for overseas Singaporeans

Common challenges associated with postal voting

10 ELD is studying the introduction of postal voting to allow overseas Singaporeans to mail in their votes to ELD.² Many countries have implemented postal voting. Their experiences have provided valuable insights on the benefits and challenges associated with postal voting. Common challenges include:

- a) Security and secrecy of the ballot. Postal ballot papers may be lost or tampered with during postal delivery. There is little or no way of ensuring that the process for the handling of the postal ballot paper enroute to Singapore is secure throughout. Voter secrecy may also be compromised if the marked postal ballot paper indicating the voter's choice is enclosed in a return envelope printed with personal identifiers;
- b) Difficulty in ascertaining whether the person who marked the postal ballot is the voter and is doing so without duress or benefit. For example, anyone staying at the same address as the voter, such as family members and housemates, can mark the voter's postal ballot paper and there is no way of detecting such acts. Even if the voter had marked the postal ballot paper himself, there is no way of telling whether the voter did so under duress or benefit;
- c) Difficulty in ensuring that the ballots will be posted and received in time to be counted. Registered postal voters may not receive their postal ballot papers in time to mark and send them back to the authorities to be counted before the deadline. The reliability of postal services is another factor that can contribute to delays; and
- d) Discrepancy between number of postal ballot papers issued and number of votes received. This may cast doubts on the integrity of the process even though there may be legitimate reasons for the discrepancy, such as marked postal ballot papers being lost or delayed during postal delivery.

Proposed arrangement

11 To mitigate the above challenges, ELD is exploring the following:

² ELD has studied other options, including setting up more overseas polling stations. However, setting up new overseas polling stations will be very resource intensive. Moreover, having more overseas polling stations may not fully address the accessibility issue, because some overseas electors will still find the overseas polling stations inaccessible, for example, if they live in another part of the country.

- a) **Deliver both postal ballot papers and return envelopes to postal voters via electronic means.** This is to ensure that the postal ballot papers are received by the postal voters in a timely manner and to provide sufficient time for them to mark the postal ballot papers and mail back to ELD in time to be counted;
- b) **Require overseas Singaporeans to submit a specimen signature when registering as postal voters and to sign physically on the return envelope when mailing back to ELD.** This is to enable ELD to authenticate the return envelope.³ To ensure voting secrecy, there will not be any personal identifiers (e.g., name and address) on the return envelope, and the marked postal ballot paper will be separated from its return envelope and mixed with other marked postal ballot papers before the vote is counted; and
- c) **Require postal voters to return their marked postal ballot papers to ELD no later than 10 days after Polling Day to be accepted for counting and must be posted before Polling Day in Singapore.** We plan to reject return envelopes postmarked after the eve of Polling Day in Singapore to ensure that all postal ballot papers are marked before the close of poll in Singapore.⁴

Process for downloading and self-printing both postal ballot paper (PBP) and return envelope, before mailing back to ELD in Singapore



³ Postal voters can submit a signature that is different from their normal signatures such as those used for bank transactions if there is concern on exposure of their signatures.

⁴ This is similar to the current approach where overseas electors based in time zones behind Singapore, vote at overseas polling stations in Dubai, London, New York City, Washington, D.C. and San Francisco on the eve of Polling Day.