

I have worked with the Irish Register since about 1970. Also as a student, I was employed by a London Council to go door to door compiling their register. I am the progenitor of Leixlip Town Council, the last local authority to be created in Ireland.

I don't agree with the Minister that the current system is at all satisfactory.

The old hard-copy system was better. Because it was readily accessible and could be checked for compliance. However, with the decline in participation in party politics, registers were less likely to be checked by anyone.

Local authorities, who appear to be paid to compile registers, are well nigh inactive. They pay nobody to check, door to door, registers. They won't remove names of persons who are said to have died or left or emigrated or moved to different areas. One can understand this when third parties notify them of these changes. However, they could seek to confirm the alleged change by writing or emailing the party to be removed from the register.

It has been my recent experience that Gardai in Garda Stations ask questions as to why I want to see the register of electors, instead of simply handing it to me to examine; it is none of their business...

I believe the Register should be on-line for all to see and check, with provision for providing feedback to the compiler (who need not be local authorities). Local authorities have a weak, if vested interest in bulking up registers with left or deceased persons, as their managers' pay is linked with population etc. It might be argued that an on-line, open register would breach a person's privacy; we have open telephone books, which present no big deal to the public and hard copy registers are available at several places.

The current on-line system is prone to errors for checking, because only an exact replication of the digital record will confirm a person on the register; even a comma, apostrophe, or misspelling, eg Mac rather than Mc, will thwart a check.

Provision for cross-checking where a person has more than one property, and even properties in different townlands/ DEDs need to be made. *I once got into 'hot water' for having a person's name removed from a business premises, after I discovered he had an address in the adjoining county. The person was informed that I 'shopped' them to the Council; he rightly argued that he had created a flat for himself in the commercial premises and his other address was a ruined house. He had no PP for the flat...*

Regulations should ensure that titles of all persons should be excluded from the Register; I have seen persons described as 'Sister', 'Father' etc, which is unacceptable and discrimination on grounds of religious status. It is a moot point as to whether the gender of a person should appear where the first name may be assigned to either male or female, rendering checking complex.

Regulations should provide for asking for evidence of precise spelling of unusual names, such as presentation of a passport or birth cert. *My GP has had experience of the same person presenting with different names for some irregular purpose.*

Constituency revisions should automatically take place after each Census becomes available. I recall a Minister (P Flynn) deciding NOT to use a revised census to amend local area constituencies, when there was ample time to do so. The election which followed breached the convention that we are all equal before the law. I took legal advice with the intention of litigating, but desisted in the end.

There are many duplications of persons on the registers now because of either a person having either no complete address, or alternative addresses (such as my own). The absence of house numbering is a handicap. At present only towns with statutory status had the authority to compel house numbering schemes. The law should be extended to enable County Councils to create road names, after consultation and (never after divisive religious figures) and house numbering schemes, and road labelling, such as exists in Northern Ireland. A fine of 10s for non compliance is inadequate.

Regulations should provide for additional indicators of names where two or more persons have the same first and second name in a property.

In the event of citizens from abroad being permitted to vote, some thought should be given as to how these are to be accommodated and reconciled with the regular Register.

While it is a tangential matter, there is a need for some regulation of the lawyers normally employed to determine the number and location of polling stations; they appear to show no concern about value for money: far too many small polling stations.

Good Luck with the work.

Perhaps when your work is done, you should publish the recommendations for a second stage consultation on them.

Yours sincerely,

JOHN COLGAN