

London Voter Registration Week 2019

Evaluation Report

February 2020



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City Hall
The Queen's Walk
London SE1 2AA

www.london.gov.uk
enquiries 020 7983 4100
minicom 020 7983 4458

The GLA would like to thank:

Dr. Elisabeth Pop

Citizenship and Integration Adviser

Citizenship & Integration Initiative

The London Voter Registration Week 2019 delivery partner

HOPE not hate Charitable Trust



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London Voter Registration Week

16 – 22 September 2019

Overview

London has one of the lowest voter registration rates across the UK regions and nations [“Atlas of Democratic Variation”, Cabinet Office, January 2019]. Young people, who are more likely to be recent home movers, private renters and from a Black and ethnic minority (BAME) background, are the most under-registered groups, with 1 in 3 young Londoners missing from the electoral register [“Survey of Londoners”, Greater London Authority, June 2019]. Hence, in September 2019, in line with its remit, the Greater London Authority (GLA) collaborated and coordinated on a pilot programme aimed to reduce inequalities in voter registration among young Londoners, in particular.

London Voter Registration Week (LVRW) launched on International Democracy Day - 15 September 2019. Daily online and offline activity took place between 16 and 22 September in over 20 boroughs with the support of HOPE not hate Charitable Trust (the delivery partner), members of the London Voter Registration Strategic Partnership (LVRSP) and a broad civil society coalition of support.

Through a combination of online campaigning and on-the-ground voter registration drives on college and university campuses and in places of worship, targeted digital assets and a LVRW Hub hosting digital, video, print and educational resources, including a “Take Your Place” democracy lesson plan, the pilot managed to engage:

- 25,000 Londoners via voter registration drives
- 60,000 Londoners via voter registration packs
- 1.3 million Londoners via the online campaign
- Cross - party support, with 13 London boroughs, the London Assembly and individual London Youth Assembly members supporting LVRW
- 40 organisations and community groups joining the coalition of support and reinforcing the non-partisan, impartial, non-election specific nature of the project

London Voter Registration Strategic Partnership

To collaborate, coordinate and support this work, the GLA established the London Voter Registration Strategic Partnership (LVRSP). The GLA invited representatives from borough electoral services, the Association of Electoral Administrators, the Electoral Commission, education institutions and youth organisations to form an advisory group to inform and advise the GLA on its 2019 voter registration activities.

The LVRSP was designed as a long-term strategic partnership that would enable the GLA to maintain close working relationships with statutory bodies, London Councils and civil society on these issues. Via the bi-annual meetings and regular conversations, the LVRSP acted as a conduit for sharing best practice, reviewing LVRW 2019 assets, supporting with the delivery of LVRW2019 and its evaluation, including testing and learning from new approaches to tackle voter registration inequality and thus inform any future GLA work in this area.

LVRW 2019 – Online campaign

The LVRW campaign hashtag was **#TakeYourPlace** - a reference to the crucial role democratic participation plays in our communities, our great city and in history. The design of the campaign had at its heart digital and video assets, print voter registration resources and educational tools. They were all designed by young people and tested via a focus group of young Londoners.

For easy access, all the assets were hosted on the LVRW Hub – **registertovote.london** – a website built to outlive the 2019 pilot project and host all future activity and resources. The Hub featured on its landing page a prominent link to the Government's voter registration website and a video with a diverse group of young Londoners, which focused on the importance of the right to vote.

The LVRW Hub also housed a downloadable LVRW toolkit – a voter registration pack, complete with leaflets, posters and a guide containing step-by-step instructions on how to organise an impartial, non-party political voter registration drive and a "Take Your Place" democracy lesson plan, so that education institutions could engage with their students in citizenship education and active democratic participation.

The FAQ section of the Hub answered any questions that people might have, particularly around the franchise - who can register and vote in the UK. The Partners page displayed the logos of the broad coalition of organisations who supported LVRW 2019.



LVRW 2019 – Offline campaign

Online voter registration drives need to be coupled with offline events, especially in order to reach under-represented and under-registered communities.

The GLA could have achieved more with a longer timescale and in a less politically charged context. Even so, thanks to the LVRSP and the networks of the delivery partner, the GLA was able to begin building some partnerships before education institutions and other strategic partners closed for the summer. This provided some time to assess if partners could organise on-the-ground voter registration drives during LVRW or if a LVRW pack was more appropriate.

For LVRW to resonate with the target demographics, different events and versions of the resources were produced. For example, stalls at colleges and universities were specifically geared towards students and young people, whereas events at mosques and Black churches raised awareness about low registration rates amongst BAME communities. Activity was planned around busy times, with high footfall, to engage the target audiences at key moments - in Churches on Sunday, Mosques on Friday and colleges during lunchtimes.

With almost a third of young Londoners not being registered to vote, a priority identified by consulting education and youth organisations was the need to raise awareness about the history and the benefits of the franchise. The “Take Your Place” democracy lesson plan was used by College Student Enrichment Teams, University Students Unions, and community groups across London during LVRW and was designed as a resource meant to outlive the 2019 pilot.

LVRW deliberately took place the week coinciding with many university and college Freshers Fairs and the period when electoral services are carrying out their annual canvass - the perfect opportunity to raise awareness and get young Londoners registered en-masse and to support the activity of electoral services. Attending Freshers Fairs facilitated conversations with incoming and returning students, many of whom had recently moved out of their family homes, or into new rented accommodation. The voter registration drives offered students an easy way to register, but also encouraged them to go back to their halls or homes and remind their new flatmates or family members to do the same.



LVRW 2019 – Reach

- LVRW launched with a **video** featuring six young Londoners talking about the importance of registering to vote. On its first day, the video had 2,000 views on the London Gov Twitter account alone.

Across the various platforms and the partners' social media platforms, the video had over 5,000 views in the week, all organic. There was a deliberate decision in the design of the pilot project, based on best practice, to launch with the video and for the rest of LVRW to drive traffic to the Government's voter registration website (www.gov.uk/register-to-vote) and ensure there were as few steps as possible in the actual process of voter registration.

- **Up to 25,000 Londoners engaged via voter registration drives** organised by HOPE not hate Charitable Trust on college and university campuses, in places of worship and community centres.

This figure includes individuals who were registered to vote on the spot, pledges from individuals who said they want to register at home or who, if already registered, pledged to register a family member or friend, individual conversations with disengaged or disenfranchised individuals who said they will consider registering, students who got individual emails from their education institutions encouraging them to register, as well as people reached via community newsletters and encouraged to vote by faith leaders during religious services.

We cannot establish how many went on and registered, but the engagement figures and the impact should be considered in this wider context. Based on the data collected by the delivery partner at the colleges, universities and community voter registration drives they ran, almost 70% of the Londoners they engaged with in person during LVRW 2019 were under 25 years old and over 60% were BAME.

- **Up to 60,000 Londoners engaged via the LVRW packs** requested by coalition partners (packs made up of a guide on how to organise a drive, voter registration leaflets and posters, stickers, the democracy lesson plan, digital assets used in newsletters, campus displays, etc.).

This figure includes the membership, subscribers, student population or target audience of the various coalition partners who ordered the "Take Your Place" LVRW 2019 pack and pledged to use it during the week itself and beyond, part of their citizenship and enrichment activity, active citizenship awareness raising or any other non-party political, democratic engagement work.

- **3,583 unique engagements via the social media channels of London Gov**, 47,400 impressions and a reach of over 12,500.

- **14,425 unique engagements via the social media channels of HOPE not hate Charitable Trust and the targeted ads**, 4 million impressions and a reach of over 1.3 million.
- LVRW had the support of a **broad coalition made up of over 40 organisations** – from the members of the LVRSP, youth organisations, colleges and universities, faith and interfaith groups and institutions, community groups.
- LVRW had the support of the **London Association of Electoral Administrators**, in recognition that LVRW 2019 helped build some capacity for their endeavours at a time when electoral services are often under-staffed and under-resourced.
- **London borough councils**, led by different political parties, shared LVRW content: Lambeth Council, Hammersmith and Fulham Council, Barnet Council, Kingston Council, Tower Hamlets Council, Kensington and Chelsea Council, Lewisham Council, Bexley Council, Richmond Council, Croydon Council, Islington Council, Harrow Council, Brent Council.
- LVRW also had the support of the **London Assembly** and of **London Youth Assembly** members.

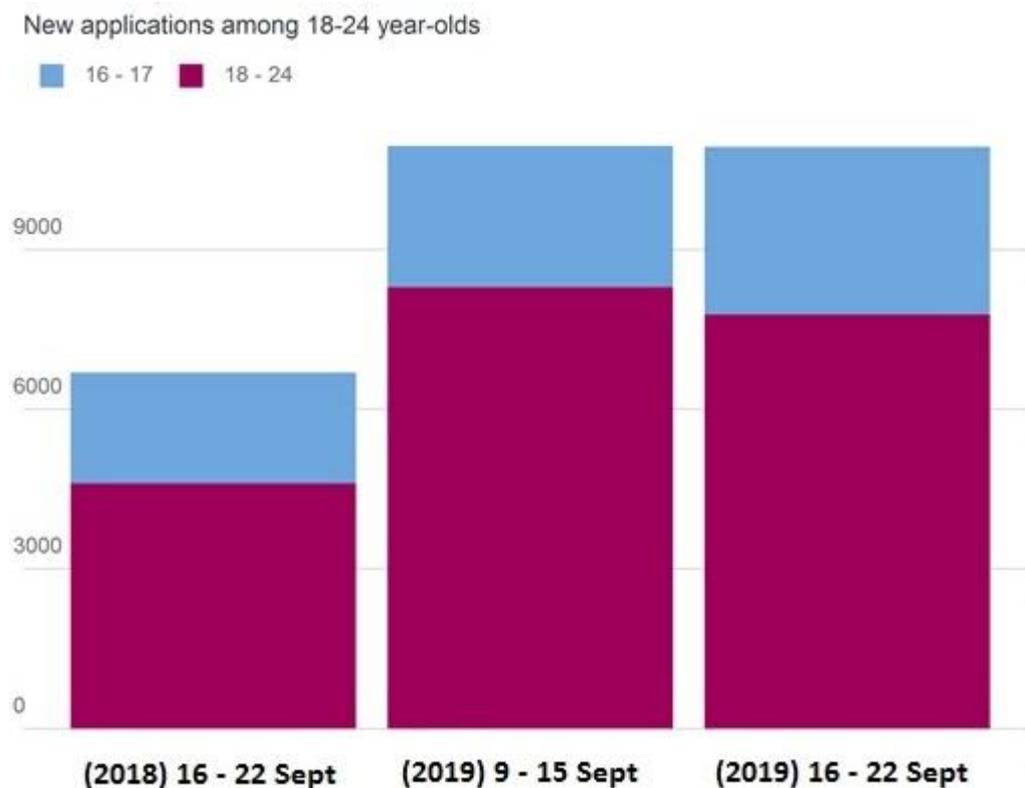
LVRW 2019 – Impact

The Cabinet Office has supplied the GLA with data on voter registration applications (segmented by day, by age group, by London borough local authority) for the periods 16 – 22 September 2019 (LVRW), 9 – 15 September 2019 (pre-LVRW) and 16 – 22 September 2018 (the equivalent week in the previous year).

We know that any intervention meant to increase awareness about the benefits and process of voter registration is better than no intervention, and that a potential election (*especially a general election which traditionally has a much higher turnout than local elections*) will always be the biggest driving force behind increased voter registration rates.

Based on the figures provided by the Cabinet Office, these are the key findings:

- LVRW 2019 took place during the annual canvass and in the background of increased speculation about an impending snap general election. Undoubtedly, this had a major impact in terms of increased voter registration rates among all Londoners, including young people, hence, no real impact can be detected when comparing LVRW 2019 (16 – 22 September) with the previous week (9 – 15 September 2019), but we can note a slight increase in the registration rates of “attainers” (individuals who reach the age of 18 during the currency of the register (or registration) year; they are included in electoral statistics for both the Parliamentary electorate and the local government electorate.)

Figure 1: Voter registration rates in London

Source: Cabinet Office data

Voter registration rates in London for people under 25 years old in September 2018 and September 2019

London / under 25 years	16 - 22 Sept 2018	9 - 15 Sept 2019	LVRW 16 - 22 Sept 2019	Change since previous year	%	Change since previous week	%
	6,687	10,946	10,928	4,241	63%	-18	0%

Voter registration rates UK wide for people under 25 years old in September 2019

UK wide / under 25 years	9 - 15 Sept 2019	LVRW 16 - 22 Sept 2019	Change since previous week	%
	77,862	67,343	-10,519	-16%

- However, a significant increase in voter registration rates among 16 – 24-year-old Londoners can be noticed when comparing LVRW 2019 with the same period in 2018, when only the annual canvass took place. While this was largely driven by speculation of an impending general election, LVRW arguably had some contribution towards this increase compared to the previous year - 63% increase among 16 to 24-year olds, compared with an increase of just 50% across all other age bands.
- There was a drop off in the voter registration rates among under 25-year olds across the UK in the week of LVRW (16 – 22 September), compared to the previous one (9 – 15 September) – the week of the initial speculation around a potential early general election. In London, we saw a drop similar to the UK-wide figure in 18-24-year-olds, but an increase for 16-17-year-olds. Arguably, this could be down to many factors, not least the demographic differences between London and the rest of the UK, the hard work of London borough electoral services - who would have been at different stages in their annual canvass outreach - but it might partially also be due to the LVRW effect. The GLA and the delivery partner worked closely with the Association of Colleges and we had voter registration drives or sent voter registration packs to a dozen London Colleges and Sixth Forms.

Up to 25,000 Londoners were reached via the LVRW 2019 drives, up to 60,000 with the LVRW packs and there were up to 18,000 unique engagements via the targeted social media campaign. The budget for LVRW 2019 was £80,000, so the GLA spent less than £1 per person to reach these Londoners. Given LVRW 2019 was a pilot project, this is good value for money and a benchmark for the GLA to build on.

LVRW 2019 – Lessons learned

On balance, based on the feedback from LVRSP members, the delivery partner, education institution and other coalition partners, we can argue that the 2019 LVRW pilot was a success, but we should stress that the general election speculation means that we cannot draw very strong conclusions about impact on registration rates.

However, some of the key lessons learned are:

- Procuring the services of a delivery partner with a strong reputation and track record was key to delivering this pilot project in such a short period of time
- Deciding the target audience early on was key to ensuring clear messaging and appropriate resources
- Assets designed using the delivery partners' best practice and the feedback of the target audience, the regulator and strategic partners reinforced the non-party political, impartial, non-election specific nature of the pilot project

- The targeted digital, print and educational resources ensured every partner had something for their key audience and were thus well received by external stakeholders
- The strategic decision to launch in mid-September, at the start of the academic year and during the annual canvass, was crucial to reaching the target audience en – masse
- LVRW benefitted from expectations around an impending general election, which means voter registration was at the forefront of many media and politically engaged Londoners, but this has made evaluation difficult
- While the main focus was the online campaign, in order to reach under-registered and under-represented groups, the voter registration drives in colleges, universities and places of worship were instrumental
- Conversations at college, university and community voter registration drives have shown:
 - many EU and Commonwealth Londoners do not know they can register to vote and what elections they can vote in
 - many 16- and 17-year olds do not know they can register to vote at 16. This and the consequences of the introduction of Individual Electoral Registration explain the low voter registration rates among attainers
 - young BAME and migrant Londoners are often gatekeepers to their parents' democratic participation and integration, especially if there are cultural and linguistic barriers
- The GLA should take into account that by the Autumn of 2020, at least two elections would have taken place – the December 2019 snap general election and the May 2020 London elections. As such, the GLA should adjust its strategy and metrics accordingly for a potential LVRW campaign in September 2020.

Following the pilot project and feedback from LVRSP and wider coalition members, the GLA plans to continue collaborative work aimed at increasing the voter registration rates of under-registered and under-represented Londoners. This will include building on the success of LVRW 2019 in order to design and deliver a larger LVRW 2020.

Maddy Sala, London Youth Assembly Member, Hammersmith and Fulham: “I support London Voter Registration Week because young people are the next generation of activists and politicians, so we need to get them involved as soon as possible in order to move into a more politically and socially aware generation.”

Nick Lowles, founder & chief executive of HOPE not hate: “Politics can often feel fraught nowadays, but registering to vote is one way in which everyone can share in moving us forward: whoever you are, whatever you think, you have a stake in the direction your community goes in, the same as anyone else. Registering to vote means taking your place in the corridors of power. I’m proud HOPE not hate Charitable Trust was the delivery partner for LVRW 2019, could build on its best practice and former coalition work, and thus make a measurable difference to this key issue of social integration.”

Erica Ramos, Vice-President National Union of Students: “London Voter Registration Week was such an important campaign to be involved in. There is power in the polls, and young people can shape the future of London and the UK. But only if they register to vote, so thank you for helping to give students this opportunity!”

Amber Gonen, Sabbatical Officer, London University of Arts Students’ Union: “Having over 18 thousand students, voter registration is a really important issue for us at the Student Union. Being part of the London Voter Registration Week campaign meant the University and SU could easily get the message to students with maximum reach, but not too much stress.”

Peter Mayhew-Smith, Group Principal and CEO of South Thames Colleges Group: “Voting is one of the great rights of our society. To have this right is to be able to help the world progress. Not having this right silences you, takes your voice out of the debate and leaves you unable to make a difference.”

Laura Marks, OBE, Consultant and Interfaith activist: “If you are not registered, you can’t vote, it’s that simple. Everyone has particular issues that matter to them and which they want to be heard by the people who run our country. The views and specific needs of our faith and minority groups matter and our voices need to be heard.”

Bibi Khan, President, London Islamic Cultural Society: “I would like to thank all those connected to London Voter Registration Week for attending our Mosque/Cultural Centre to raise awareness to our community of this very essential and important requirement - to be able to exercise their democratic right. Our community can be hard to reach; by your Officers attending the Mosque meant that the message reached many who may not have thought about their roles in community and how essential their participation is.”

Adrian Axtell, National Secretary for Community Union: “This voter registration drive is vitally important to ensuring that the voices of young working people are heard at every level.”



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