

UK parliamentary candidates' election expenses: changes in 2010

August 2009

If the current Parliament is dissolved on or after 1 January 2010, new rules will apply to candidates' election expenses at the next election.

If you are thinking of standing for Parliament or being an election agent, you need to understand and follow these rules.

This brief guide outlines the new rules and how to get in touch with us for further advice.

We will publish more detailed guidance on election expenses in September 2009.

What are the changes?

Introduction

At present, spending limits for candidates begin when you formally become a candidateⁱ and end on polling day. This period is often known as 'the short campaign'.

The Political Parties and Elections Act 2009 (the 2009 Act) introduces a separate new limit, which begins when a Parliament has been sitting for more than 55 months. This limit ends when Parliament is dissolved.

In this brief guide, the period during which the new limit applies is called the long campaign.

How would the new rules affect a 2010 general election?

The 2009 Act provides that the new rules can only take effect from 1 January 2010.

Parliament can not sit for longer than 60 months. This means that it must be dissolved on 10 May 2010 at the latest, with polling day on 3 June.

What are the limits?

The limit for the long campaign

How much you can spend on campaigning in the long campaign depends on when Parliament is dissolved.

If Parliament sits for the whole period between 1 January and 11 April, you can spend the maximum sum. If it is dissolved earlier, you can spend a lower proportion of that sum, as shown below.

The maximum sum is £25,000 plus:

- 5p per elector in a borough constituency, or
- 7p per elector in a county constituencyⁱⁱ.

Parliament dissolved between:	Spending limit – as % of maximum
1 Jan – 10 Jan	60%
11 Jan – 10 Feb	70%
11 Feb – 10 March	80%
11 March – 10 April	90%
11 April – 10 May	100%

The limit for the short campaign

The limit for the short campaign is £7150 plus:

- 5p per elector in a borough constituency, or
- 7p per elector in a county constituency.

A worked example

In autumn 2009, your party selects you as their prospective parliamentary candidate in a borough constituency which has 70,000 electors.

The long campaign

The maximum spending limit will be £25,000 plus 5p for each elector. 70,000 x 5p is £3500. This adds up to £28,500.

Parliament is dissolved on Friday 12 March 2010, for a general election on Thursday 8 April. This means that you formally become a candidate on 12 March 2010.

Between 1 January 2010 and 12 March 2010, you can spend 90% of the maximum of £28,500. So your expenses limit for the long campaign is £25,650.

The short campaign

From 12 March, your limit is £7150, plus 5p for each of the 70,000 electors (£3500). So the total for this period is £10,650.

You will need to apportion things used in both periods between each of them, based on the amount used in each period.

What are 'election expenses'?

This section sets out some of the main points. You will also need to read our detailed guidance, which will set out in more detail what you need to count as election expenses.

Only you, your election agent and anyone authorised by one of you can *incur* expenses. Once you have appointed your agent, only your agent can *pay* most types of election expenses and they must keep invoices or receipts for amounts over £20.

Election expenses cover what you spend on certain items used to promote you as a candidate. They include:

- Leaflets and other unsolicited material sent to electors
- Advertising
- Transport
- Public meetings
- Staff costs
- Accommodation
- Admin costs, such as stationery, telephone calls

They do not include:

- Volunteer time
- Use of anyone's sole or main home, if it is given free of charge
- Transport in a vehicle which was acquired for someone's personal use, and given free of charge
- Use of computing or printing equipment primarily acquired for personal use (if given free of charge)

How do I report my spending?

Your agent must complete an election expenses return for each period, and give it to your local returning officer within 35 days of the date the result is announced.

A separate return will be needed for each period.

You will both need to sign a declaration that the return is complete and accurate to the best of your knowledge and belief.

Forms and detailed guidance will be available from our website before each period begins.

What else do I need to know?

You will also need to report donations over £50 which are given to you for your election expenses. You include these on your election expenses return.

You can only accept donations over £50 from certain sources with links to the UK. Please refer to our full guidance for more information.

There are also limits on the amount that parties can spend in the year before a general election. If you are standing on behalf of a party, some of your campaigning may be covered by these limits – particularly if relates the party rather than to a candidate. You should ask your party for details of their procedures for this type of spending to make sure that you are authorised to incur it.

You can find more information about the party spending controls in our *Campaign Expenditure* guidance which can be found on our website www.electoralcommission.org.uk

i You formally become a candidate when Parliament is dissolved, or if later, when you declare yourself as a candidate to others, or are successfully nominated as one.

ii The local electoral services office will be able to tell you if you are in a county or borough constituency.

Where can I get further advice?

Our initial guidance on election expenses will be published in September 2009.

If you have any questions about spending at elections or would like more information, please contact us on 020 7271 0616, or pef@electoralcommission.org.uk, or at:

Party and Election Finance
The Electoral Commission
Trevelyan House
London
SW1P 2HW

You can also contact one of our devolved offices:

Scotland Office

28 Thistle Street
Edinburgh EH2 1EN
Tel: 0131 225 0200
Fax:0131 225 0205
Textphone: 18001 01310 225 0200
infoscotland@electoralcommission.org.uk

Wales Office

Caradog House
1-6 Saint Andrews Place
Cardiff CF10 3BE
Tel: 029 2034 6800
Fax:029 2034 6805
Textphone: 18001 029 2034 6800
infowales@electoralcommission.org.uk

Northern Ireland Office

Seatem House
28-32 Alfred Street
Belfast BT2 8EN
Tel: 028 9089 4020
Fax:028 9089 4026
Textphone: 18001 028 9089 4020
infonorthernireland@electoralcommission.org.uk