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Our Ref: TO2016/473

Mr Brian Cave
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18 July 2016

Dear Mr Cave,

Thank you for your email of 12 July, regarding overseas voting rights. Your email has been passed to the Constitution Group within the Cabinet Office, who deal with this matter.

The franchise for the EU referendum was based on the franchise for UK Parliamentary elections and this was debated, voted on and agreed by Parliament. As the referendum was an issue of national significance Parliament concluded that the franchise used in general elections was the right one to use.

Under the Representation of the People Act 1985, overseas British citizens seeking to vote must register as an overseas elector, but this option is only available to those who were on the electoral register before leaving the UK and who meet the 15 year limit.

However, the Government has plans to remove this restriction on overseas voting rights, which were set out in their manifesto for this parliament in May 2015. This will be delivered by means of a Government Bill once policy details have been finalised and a suitable slot in the legislative timetable identified. We are making steady progress on both of these points and subject to the necessary Parliamentary approval, this will be fully in place for the next scheduled UK Parliamentary elections.

UK citizens living in the EU, and citizens from other Member States living in the UK, get a range of rights from our membership of the EU including access to healthcare. All of these rights will have to be covered in a successor arrangement.

I hope you find this useful in outlining the Government's position.

Regards,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "M. Travers", is written over a horizontal blue line.

Michael Travers

Constitution Group | Cabinet Office