

e-Counting in Greater London



Processing the ballot papers for the Greater London Assembly and Mayoral elections held on 4th May 2000, was an extremely complex, large volume and time critical project. This was one of the biggest election counts of its type that had ever been undertaken anywhere and attracted widespread interest.

No more manual updates



The London Assembly and Mayoral elections were the first in the UK to entirely use automated ballot counting and a mixture of electoral systems. Voters in 4500 polling stations cast up to four

votes on two different ballot papers - the Mayoral election used the supplementary vote system, the Assembly election the additional member system.

There were 15 different major types of ballot papers. The election authorities had estimated that counting the votes manually would have taken up to a week and produced a less accurate result.

DRS worked closely with the election authorities in designing, producing and configuring a complete system able to best meet the demanding requirements of new elections in one of the world's major capital cities. At the core of the project were DRS high speed Optical Mark Readers which are able to process intermixed ballot papers in any orientation at a speed of over 2 ballot papers per second. These scanners precisely detect votes and any potential reasons for rejection. Doubtful ballot papers were separately sorted by the scanners for a computer assisted adjudication process based on existing manual practice.



Data collection

In addition, DRS provided many other crucial products and services for the London elections:

- The design, printing and distribution of 11 million specialised ballot papers, including postal ballot papers - each one carrying unique, secure barcodes.
- All the necessary hardware and software to operate 14 counting centres across London, all linked into a central consolidation venue. The software was innovative, rigorously designed, written and tested and then independently certified. Fault tolerant and secure hardware, software and communications were used to ensure the integrity and security of all election data.
- The installation, commissioning, breakdown and removal of all the on-site equipment and the provision of around 300 trained personnel to operate the system. Every site was backed up by on-site DRS support staff with two further levels of DRS support available.
- A complete training and support package for staff from the election authorities.
- A range of other essential items from ballot boxes to presentation equipment.

The automated vote counting of the London Assembly and Mayoral elections was one of the most complex logistical projects that DRS had ever managed. It was a huge success - delivering a clear and accurate result overnight - a complete demonstration of fast, accurate, time critical data capture.

The Secretary of State stated:

"The Greater London Returning Officer has stressed that Ministers can be satisfied that the first use of electronic counting in an election of this size and complexity worked very well and fully in line with expectations, a manual count would have taken many more days to complete."



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