

Section 2

2

About this guidance

Our aim

The aim of this guidance is to improve the usability and accessibility of voter materials, by considering voters' needs, so that voters can be confident that they have voted the way they intended to, and that their vote will be counted. The guidance should also help to bring greater consistency to the design of materials used across the UK, so that voters have a similarly good experience wherever they are voting.

We hope that it will:

- Help electoral administrators to produce voter materials that meet legislative requirements, carry out the function of the material effectively, and are accessible and usable.
- Demonstrate to policy-makers the need to include user-focused design as a key consideration in the development of electoral policy and law.
- Encourage changes and developments in electoral law and policy to ensure voter materials for use at elections and referendums are usable and accessible.

There is no easy solution to designing voter materials. The circumstances of each election vary, including the number of candidates or parties standing, the body or office being elected to, the number of seats being elected to, and whether or not the election is combined with another election. These variations affect the requirements of electoral stationery, which makes it impossible to take a 'one size fits all' approach.

What we have tried to do is to give you guidance to help you make good decisions about designs, whether produced in-house or externally, and identify the things you should consider when making those decisions. The guidance does not attempt to define, for example, what the 'perfect' ballot paper size is, nor does it cover every element of every document. It concentrates both on

the general principles of good, user-friendly design, and on how these should be applied specifically to individual voter materials.

Although the guidance does not cover all materials a voter may have to use in relation to elections and referendums, much of the good practice it contains can be applied to other materials, such as registration forms and poll cards.

The guidance is not compulsory. However, it is what we recommend as good practice, and it should be followed where possible. It may be that you are not able to follow the guidance in full, all the time. We appreciate that, for instance, colour printing is more expensive than black and white. But we encourage you to try and adopt the best practice in the guidance as much as possible, and always think about how you can put the voter first when you are designing and producing voter materials.

Using this guidance

This guidance does not replace or supersede any existing requirements, statutory or non-statutory, for Returning Officers to produce materials in accessible formats.

Organisation and structure


This guidance is for people designing or producing voter materials within the context of existing legislation (at the time of publication). It is intended to apply to the design of documents, or parts of documents, over which there is some discretion, or documents that are not prescribed.⁶

Terms used in this guidance


Where the guidance refers to voting for a candidate or party, this means voting for one, or more than one candidate or party, depending on the electoral system in use.


⁶ Our version of the guidance for government policy-makers contains both the guidance in this version, and also the parts of the guidance that are recommendations for improvements, but which cannot be implemented without legislative change.

Symbols used in this guidance

 Indicates a link to another section of the guidance.

 Indicates an explanation of the preceding text.

 Indicates a link to detailed guidance giving a fuller explanation of the subject.

 Indicates information to be noted by the reader.

Contents

Section 1

An introduction to the guidance, including a background to the principles behind it.

 Section 1

Section 2

'About this guidance', which explains the purpose of the guidance and how to use it.

 Section 2

Section 3

General guidance on design considerations that applies to all materials, and should be read first, as context for the rest of the guidance. It covers style, and content and structure.

 Section 3

Section 4

Deals with each type of voter material, covering the function, style, and where applicable, content and structure of:

- ballot papers
 - polling station notices
 - polling booth notices
 - postal voting guidance
 - postal voting statements (Great Britain)
 - declarations of identity (Northern Ireland)
-

 Section 4

Section 5

Guidance for bilingual (English and Welsh) materials, covering style, and content and structure.

 Section 5

Section 6

Contains detailed guidance relating to specific features of design. This is cross-referenced from Sections 3, 4 and 5 of the guidance. In Section 6, we have collated existing good practice from professional organisations and provided links to further references and resources.

 Section 6

This section covers:

- adding emphasis
- choosing a font
- text layout and alignment
- colour and contrast
- writing in plain language

Appendix 1

Contains a design checklist that you can use to assess the design of your materials.

 Appendix 1

Appendix 2

Contains examples of voter materials, to show how the guidance could be applied to prescribed forms in practice. The example materials are based on existing prescribed forms which would be used at a UK Parliamentary general election. There is also a colour palette showing the colours used in the example designs.

 Appendix 2

The example materials are:

- polling station notice (English)
- polling station notice (bilingual)⁷
- polling booth notice (English)
- polling booth notice (bilingual)
- postal voting 'quick-start' guide (in five variants)⁸
- postal voting statement (English)
- postal voting statement (bilingual)
- declaration of identity (Northern Ireland) (English)

You can use these examples as a guide, when designing and producing your own materials for use at elections, or to help you when commissioning materials from an external supplier. The example materials can also be downloaded from the Do Politics Centre on our website at www.dopolitics.org.uk

⁷ Bilingual refers to documents in English and Welsh.

⁸ First-past-the post election, Great Britain (English); first-past-the-post election, Great Britain (bilingual); first-past-the-post election, Northern Ireland; single transferable vote election, Scotland; single transferable vote election, Northern Ireland.