

**Voting System for Electing MPs
to the House of Commons: Referendum
Question Testing**

**Qualitative research report for
the Electoral Commission**

September 2010

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This report reflects the findings of the research and does not represent the views of The Electoral Commission.

II Executive Summary

Background and Approach

- The *Parliamentary Voting Systems and Constituencies Bill* was introduced on the 22 July 2010 and includes provisions both to reduce the size of the House of Commons to 600 by boundary reviews and to hold a referendum in May on introducing the Alternative Vote system for elections to the House of Commons.
- Within this bill, a question was proposed for the referendum in relation to introducing a new voting system to vote Members of Parliament into the House of Commons.
- The proposed question in English is *“Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons”*

Yes

No

- The proposed question in Welsh is: “*Ydych chi am i’r Deyrnas Unedig ddilyn y system “Pleidlais Amgen” yn lle’r system gyfredol “y cyntaf i’r felin” ar gyfer ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ’r Cyffredin?*”¹

Ydw

nac ydw

- The purpose of this research was to understand how well the above question performed against the Electoral Commission’s criteria for referendum questions: that is, the question should be accessible to all voters, focused, factual and neutral.
- A qualitative approach was used on this project. This was deemed the most suitable method as it allowed for a detailed exploration of the proposed question, enabling the interviewer to probe responses towards it as appropriate. The findings from qualitative research cannot be used to quantify what proportion of the general population will or will not find the question intelligible. However, they can be used to indicate where, for example, confusion or misunderstanding may arise and the reasons for this.
- This sample included 163 respondents in total. 41 respondents were interviewed in face to face depth interviews which were an hour long and 122 respondents were interviewed via group discussions which were one and a half hours long. The respondents were drawn from across the United Kingdom, with both depth interviews and group discussions conducted in each of Northern Ireland, Scotland, England and Wales. Within each country respondents were drawn from at least two locations. The respondents were drawn from across the range of socio-economic groups and included a range of ages from 17 – 70+. A number of individuals from BME backgrounds were represented across the sample as a whole. Within the depth interviews, a number of low literacy respondents (that is, those with learning difficulties, struggling readers and those with English as a

¹ The actual proposed Welsh question in the Bill is “*Ydych chi am i’r Deyrnas Unedig ddilyn y system “Pleidlais Amgen” yn lle’r system gyfredol “y cyntaf i’r felin” ar gyfer ethol Aelodau Seneddol i **Dæ’r** Cyffredin?*” . The actual proposed question was deemed to have a spelling mistake and therefore for the research the question was changed where it is emboldened, i.e. to **Dŷ’r** instead.

second language) were included. All respondents would be eligible to vote in May 2011.

- All respondents were asked to individually respond to the proposed question, that is, they read the question individually and responded to it before it was discussed with the moderator or other members of the group. In terms of the approach, just under two thirds of the respondents saw the question 'blind' - without being provided with any information about the systems prior to seeing the proposed question. This was felt important so that responses to and understanding of the proposed question could be explored without any undue influence from discussion of the different voting systems, and also to emulate the individual task of voting. These respondents were then provided with information about the two voting systems after they had read the question and asked to re-visit the question. Through the course of the fieldwork it was apparent that awareness of the Alternative Vote system was very low. To develop and build on the findings, it was felt helpful to provide the latter third of respondents with information about the Alternative Vote system prior to seeing the proposed question, in order that the intelligibility of the proposed question could be explored once people understood the systems.
- In addition, the respondents (aside from the first pilot sessions - three groups and four depths) across the sample were asked to respond to four *alternative* questions and one abbreviated question to assess if the way that these questions were worded could provide any further insights or learnings.
- A discussion guide for the groups is included in the Appendices. This highlights the different approaches used in the research sessions.

Key Findings

Overall awareness and needs

- It is clear from the research that awareness and knowledge of the voting systems about which the proposed question is asking is low. Some respondents were aware of First Past the Post as a term and understood it as the term used for the current voting system, however there were also some for whom this term was

unfamiliar. The Alternative Vote system was not familiar to or understood by nearly all of those that took part in the study.

- Some participants made assumptions about what the Alternative Vote system is, for example:
 - A different *channel* for voting, such as postal voting or voting via the internet
 - A *different* system for voting but not an actual specific system, that is an alternative that has not yet been agreed
 - A system of Proportional Representation (for some respondents, mainly in Northern Ireland and Scotland)

- This research therefore highlighted that the electorate will need to be informed and educated on these two systems prior to the referendum in order that they are able to answer the question in the way in which they intend. In the case of First Past the Post this was seen as relatively straightforward and easy to explain. In the case of the Alternative Vote system, some respondents struggled significantly with the mechanics of this system and are likely to require a simple ‘step by step’ guide. Using visuals to help demonstrate elements of the system, for example on how preferences are redistributed, was felt to help explain the process.

- Beyond an explanation of the two systems in terms of process, that is ‘how a voter casts a vote’ and ‘how a candidate wins’, many respondents also wished to know the *implications* of the systems. Specifically, they wished to know the pros and cons of each of the systems and what would be the likely outcomes of each system if they were to be used. Many felt that they would not be able to cast an informed vote without this further detail. Although there was some expectation of the media or political parties explaining this to them, some sought to have a more neutral explanation if possible.

Response to the Question

- This lack of knowledge of the two systems had a significant impact on participants’ ability to respond to the question or affected how they chose to respond to it. Specifically, within the research some participants felt that they could not answer the question as they did not know what they were voting for.

Others voted 'no' to avoid the unfamiliar - while they were aware of First Past the Post, their lack of understanding of Alternative Vote meant that they felt they could not vote for it. Others made assumptions about the Alternative Vote (in the absence of concrete information) and voted 'yes'. This meant that some respondents were basing their 'yes' vote on wrong assumptions, for example, assuming the Alternative Vote system was an internet vote, postal vote or simply a different way of voting that might be better.

- Once respondents were made aware of the different systems, the proposed question was felt by many to be *fairly straightforward, clear and accessible to voters*, and, as such, they felt that they could confidently answer the question.
- Some other respondents, however, still struggled with the proposed question and had to work hard to understand it. Their issues with understanding the question were heightened by their difficulty in understanding the Alternative Vote system itself. These were typically those who were less engaged with politics and current affairs overall, some younger respondents and some of those with low literacy (across the different types of low literacy). For a few individuals, these difficulties were sufficient for them not to answer the question in the way they intended.
- Even some of those respondents who felt that the question was fairly straightforward thought that it could potentially be made more straightforward and less ambiguous and generated some spontaneous suggestions for improvement (see below).
- Areas that respondents were looking to improve included the following:
 - Some of the language in the question was not considered 'everyday' (for example, the word 'adopt' felt formal) and they sought more familiar terms.
 - Some felt the sentence was long and they had to re-read it (often more than once) to be sure they had understood what it was asking and that they were marking the response they wished to. Thus they suggested shortening it.
 - The terms 'Members of Parliament' and 'House of Commons' were also felt by some to be 'political speak' rather than lay language and a few respondents struggled to understand what these terms meant.

- Overall, the proposed question was viewed as neutral by most. However, some respondents spontaneously suggested (and more respondents when asked to consider neutrality specifically) that it could be perceived as somewhat biased. This bias was mainly perceived to be in the direction of the Alternative Vote system, which was driven variously by:
 - The Alternative Vote system appearing first in the question
 - The word 'adopt', which indicated to a few that the Alternative Vote system was already in place and ready to be actioned
 - The phrase 'instead of', which implied to some that the current system was 'not as good'
 - An assumption in general that the referendum was being called because there should be some reason for changing the voting system

Question Alternatives

- Respondents were asked if they felt that the proposed question could be adapted to make it more straightforward. Although the question was often considered to be relatively clear, many thought that it could be improved.
- Some of the suggestions made by participants focused on changing the language used in the proposed question, as follows:
 - Changing the word 'adopt' to 'use' ('defnyddio' was suggested in Welsh) or 'change'
 - Changing 'do you want' to 'should'
 - For some, using 'MPs' instead of 'Members of Parliament' and 'UK' instead of 'United Kingdom'
- Other suggestions focused on changing the structure of the question, for example:
 - Asking the voter to mark their cross against the system they would prefer to have rather than voting yes or no
 - Simplifying the question, for example, '*Do you want the UK to change from the FPTP system to the AV system*'
 - Having shorter sentences
 - Putting First Past the Post first in the question

- Providing some description of the systems on the ballot paper
- Across the sample respondents were also asked to consider four different alternative questions and one abbreviated question (although not all five were shown to all respondents) in order to understand how clear and straightforward these were both in their own right and in comparison to the proposed question. This was to see if there were ways in which the question could be asked more clearly. These alternative questions can be found a 4.3.3 below.
- Of the alternative questions shown, some were perceived as more clear than others. The two which were felt to be least clear were:
 - *The alternative question which explained about the different voting systems in detail as part of its preamble.* Whilst some respondents valued this information, especially without any prior information with regard to the different voting systems, for most this information was felt to be too much. Furthermore, reading this amount of information felt daunting and was off-putting for those with low literacy.
 - *The alternative question which used two sentences and referred to a 'system called'.* Although this question had some of the benefits of the other version which used two sentences (discussed below), the terms 'system called' were distracting for respondents, who then focused more on the name of the system rather than the system itself.
- The abbreviated version of the question, which shortened Members of Parliament to MPs and United Kingdom to UK, was felt to be useful by some respondents who saw this version and did help to make the question more concise. In the Welsh language version, however, there was less familiarity with these terms, that is, DU (UK) and ASau (MPs) and in particular DU (UK) and thus for Welsh-speaking respondents it was not considered as clear as the longer version.
- The two other alternative versions of the questions were generally considered to be more straightforward than the proposed question.
- An alternative which used two sentences (*"At present the United Kingdom uses the "first past the post" method to elect Members of Parliament to the House of Commons. Should the "alternative vote" method be used instead?"*) worked well

with those respondents that saw it in that it was felt that to be direct and easy to understand. In particular having two short sentences was felt to improve accessibility. The first sentence helped people to understand the status quo and clarified to respondents that First Past the Post was the current system in place. The second sentence was then felt relatively simple to respond to.

- The alternative which asked voters to mark their cross against the system they would prefer instead of giving a yes or no response worked very well for many respondents that saw it and this included some who had also seen the alternative which used two sentences.

Which voting system do you want the United Kingdom to use for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?

'Alternative vote'

This is a different system from the one that is used at the moment

'First past the post'

This is the system that is used at the moment

- Respondents often found this version of the question very clear and easy to understand (including those with low literacy) and it was generally felt to be more straightforward than the proposed question. The language used in the question was felt to be more 'everyday' terminology and the explanations helped to provide an 'aide memoire' to the systems. Overall, it was felt that it was unlikely that they would 'cross' the wrong answer with this version as they would be making a mark next to the system that they wanted to choose.

III Introduction

A. Background

The coalition Government's Programme for Government contains a commitment to introducing a Bill that will include a **referendum on introducing the AV System** for the election of MPs to the House of Commons.

The **Parliamentary Voting Systems and Constituencies Bill** was introduced on the 22 July 2010 and includes provisions to both reduce the size of the House of Commons to 600 by boundary reviews and to hold a referendum on introducing the Alternative Vote for elections to the Commons.

Within this bill, a question was proposed for the referendum in May in relation to introducing a new voting system to vote Members of Parliament into the House of Commons.

The proposed question in English is *"Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the "alternative vote" system instead of the current "first past the post" system for electing Members of parliament to the House of Commons" Yes or No*

The proposed question in Welsh is: *"Ydych chi am i'r Deyrnas Unedig ddilyn y system "Pleidlais Amgen" yn lle'r system gyfredol "y cyntaf i'r felin" ar gyfer ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ'r Cyffredin?" Ydw or nac ydw*

In its role to deliver integrity and public confidence in the democratic process, the Electoral Commission ('the Commission') is required to comment on the intelligibility of referendum questions (for UK-wide, national and regional referendums and local referendums on changing the executive arrangements of local authorities).

The Commission therefore needed to assess the intelligibility of the proposed question that was published in the Bill.

The Commission believes that any referendum question should present the options to voters **clearly**, **simply** and **neutrally**. Their guidelines for assessing question intelligibility cover the following key criteria:

i) Accessibility to all voters

- easy to understand
- unambiguous
- does not mislead voters in any way
- written in plain language, i.e. language that:
 - o uses short sentences (around 15–20 words)
 - o is simple, direct, and concise
 - o uses familiar words, and avoids jargon or technical terms that would not be easily understood by most people

ii) Focused and factual

- to the point
- contains factual information only, describing the question and the options clearly and accurately
- avoids assuming anything about voters' views

iii) Lack of bias

- written in neutral language, avoiding words that suggest a judgement or opinion, either explicitly or implicitly
- ensures that voters don't consider one response more favourably than another

To ascertain the extent to which the proposed question meets these guidelines, primary qualitative research was required to test the proposed question amongst a wide range of potential voter types.

B. Research Objectives

The findings from the research will be used to inform the Commission's response to the proposed referendum question.

The Commission's aim was therefore:

- a) to look at the proposed referendum question from the perspective of people who would be eligible to vote within this referendum when it occurs, to see if it is written in a way that means they are likely to understand it, and answer it in the way they intended to;
- b) in the event of need for improvement to the question, to understand how voters' needs can be met.

The specific objectives of this research were therefore to:

- Interrogate the referendum question against the intelligibility criteria
- Identify any elements of the referendum question which may prove problematic for users in the context of the question assessment guidelines
- Explore the reasons for these problems
- Explore possible ways of addressing these problems

In addition, although it was not a primary objective for this piece of research, it was also felt to be important to understand the participants' current understanding of the existing and the Alternative Vote systems, insofar as this might affect their understanding of the question.

C. Method, Sample and Approach

1. Method

In total, 41 face to face depth interviews were conducted with individual respondents (each one hour long) and 15 group discussions were held (each with 8-9 respondents and one and half hours long).

A qualitative research approach was considered to be the most appropriate method to meet the objectives of this project.

The depth interviews allowed for detailed exploration and understanding of the question on a one-to-one basis and also allowed for the inclusion of respondents with lower literacy. Respondents discussed their spontaneous views with the moderator and the moderator was able to probe around any issues raised by the respondent.

The group discussions enabled respondents to share their thoughts with other potential voters and discuss how well they understood the proposed question. It also helped to generate ideas, where necessary, on how the question could be developed to ease understanding.

2. Sample

Overall, 163 people participated in the research. Of these respondents, 41 were interviewed individually and 122 participated in group discussions. The following tables show the types of individuals that took part in the group discussions and depth interviews.

a. Group discussions

		No. of Groups
Location	<i>England</i>	5
	<i>Wales (two English speaking, two Welsh speaking)</i>	4
	<i>Scotland</i>	3
	<i>Northern Ireland</i>	3
Age	<i>17-20</i>	2
	<i>21-29</i>	3
	<i>30-50</i>	5
	<i>50+</i>	5
Socio-economic group	<i>(A)B</i>	5
	<i>C1C2</i>	5
	<i>DE</i>	5
Total		15

Recruitment details on the groups

- The groups were split by age and socio-economic group as highlighted above.
- Each group comprised of a roughly even mix of male and female respondents.
- In Northern Ireland the groups were recruited to reflect the two main communities in Northern Ireland.
- As highlighted in the table, two groups were conducted in the Welsh language to understand response to the Welsh language version of the question.
- 16 respondents within the sample were from BME backgrounds.
- The sample included a range of voters, including those who considered themselves to be very familiar with the current voting system, and those who had not voted previously.

Locations

- The focus groups were carried out in the following locations:
 - **England** - London, Redditch, Leicester and East Yorkshire
 - **Northern Ireland** – Drumahoe and Glengormley
 - **Scotland** – East Renfrewshire and Dunfermline
 - **Wales** – Aberystwyth, Port Talbot and Colwyn Bay

b. Depth interviews

		No. of Depths
Location	<i>England</i>	14
	<i>Wales (five Welsh language, four English language)</i>	9
	<i>Scotland</i>	9
	<i>Northern Ireland</i>	9
Age	<i>17-20</i>	5
	<i>21-29</i>	7
	<i>30-50</i>	17
	<i>50+</i>	12
Socio-economic group	<i>(A)B</i>	12
	<i>C1C2</i>	15
	<i>DE</i>	14
Gender	<i>Male</i>	21
	<i>Female</i>	20
Total		41

Locations

- The depth interviews were conducted in the same locations as the group discussions, namely:
 - **England** - London, Redditch, Leicester and East Yorkshire
 - **Northern Ireland** – Drumahoe and Glengormley
 - **Scotland** – East Renfrewshire and Dunfermline
 - **Wales** – Aberystwyth, Port Talbot and Colwyn Bay

Recruitment details on depth interviews

- The depth interviews covered a range of ages and socio-economic groups as highlighted in the table above.
- The depth interviews also included 14 respondents with low literacy:
 - Five with learning difficulties (these comprised of cognitive or diagnosed reading difficulties)
 - Four with English as a second language
 - Five who were struggling readers
- As highlighted in the table, five depth interviews were conducted in the Welsh language to understand response to the Welsh language version of the question.

- Six respondents within the depths sample were from BME backgrounds.
- Four respondents within the depths had not voted previously in a general election.
- In Northern Ireland depths were recruited to reflect the two main communities in Northern Ireland.
- As with the group discussions, respondents were asked about their knowledge of other voting systems and this was recorded.

3. Recruitment

Respondents were recruited through a network of recruiters. The respondents were asked a series of questions before being invited to attend the sessions. The purpose of the questions was to ensure a wide spread of different types of respondents, for example across ages and different socio-economic backgrounds as well as to exclude those who were not eligible to vote or who recently had taken part in a market research exercise.

Respondents were offered and given a monetary incentive for taking part in the research session.

4. Approach

All respondents were asked to answer the proposed question and fill in a self-completion exercise which asked them what they thought about the proposed question. The rationale for this approach was to replicate (as much as is feasible within a research context) how respondents would encounter the question within real life, without potential influence from others. For those with low literacy, the moderator talked through the self completion exercise where required.

Due to findings emerging from the initial fieldwork, the discussion guide was adapted for the remaining fieldwork. The approach used at the different stages of the research is outlined below.

Pilot sessions

Three groups and four depth interviews were conducted in the first instance. The approach in these sessions was as follows:

- Gather individual responses to the proposed question using the self-completion exercise (without prior information) and then respondents discuss their response.
- Gather responses to a version of the question which used two sentences.²
- Show explanations of the First Past the Post and the Alternative Vote systems.
- Finally, ask respondents for any suggestions, if required, on how the proposed question could be made clearer.

After the initial pilot sessions, it was felt useful to include some additional versions of the question, to find out whether these could add further insights into what helped or hindered participants' understanding. These alternatives to the question were shown after the proposed question (and both before and after participants were asked to consider how they might change the question). Four of these alternatives were rotated, when presented to the participants, to ensure all alternative questions had a fair number of showings across the audience.³ The fifth alternative (abbreviated version) was shown towards the end of the session after these alternatives had been shown. It was shown where time allowed or where respondents had commented it would be helpful to shorten the question.

Informing respondents

Through the course of the fieldwork it became clear that nearly all respondents were not aware of the Alternative Vote system. Many were also not familiar with the term

² This version was based on a suggestion made by a plain English group in response to consultation by the Electoral Commission before fieldwork began.

³ Within each group or depth, two (out of the four) alternative questions were always shown and which two out of the four was rotated across the sessions. The order in which these two were presented was also rotated to reduce any order effect. Order effect is the term to describe how response to stimulus or information can be affected by the order or position that is shown. For example, if a piece of stimulus is always shown second it is likely to be compared to the one that is shown first rather than getting a response as it stands alone.

'First Past the Post' and did not realise it described the current voting system in a general election. Due to this lack of understanding, many respondents struggled to answer the proposed question.

As such, it was also felt to be useful (and, in part, a way to try and reflect 'real life' when voters will be provided with information about the voting systems prior to voting) to provide respondents with a description of both systems before asking them to respond to the proposed question. This approach was used with just under a third of the sample. These respondents were also shown the alternative questions and asked for their response to these.

5. Research Team and Timings

The Define Research team comprised of Joceline Jones, Victoria Page, Claire Byrne, Patrick Ell, Lucy Bush, Jon Gower and Natalie Jones (who conducted the Welsh language sessions).

Fieldwork was conducted between 16th August and 9th September 2010.

D. Analysis

At the fieldwork stage the research sessions were recorded and notes were taken through the session. The research team then listened back to the recording or worked through their notes taken in the sessions to create a set of notes and verbatim quotes.

An internal debriefing session took place with the research team to discuss findings and from this session notes were drawn up which highlighted key findings. The purpose of this was to identify key responses towards the proposed question. These were then distilled into topline findings and shared with The Electoral Commission team. The report was then drawn together using the interview notes and recordings to verify any detailed points and provide verbatim illustrations of the findings. Prior to the final report being submitted, any additional points of clarification were discussed within the Define team.

IV Detailed Findings

4.1 Context to the Proposed Question

4.1.1 Understanding of the different voting systems: Overview

The proposed question asks the voter to choose between the “First Past the Post” system and the “Alternative Vote” system. In order for voters to be able to understand the proposed question and, importantly, confidently respond to the question the way they want to, knowledge and awareness of the different voting systems are critical.

The research indicated, however, that spontaneous understanding of First Past the Post was very mixed, with some of the participants in this research unfamiliar with the term. In addition, across the sample there was almost no understanding of the Alternative Vote system.

4.1.2 Understanding of the First Past the Post (FPTP) system

Participants were asked for their spontaneous understanding of First Past the Post. They were then provided with a description with information about the system, namely how a vote is cast and how a candidate wins. This information was presented with and without visuals. The information provided can be found in Appendix 3.

Overall

Given that there was a mixed awareness of the term First Past the Post, it will be important to clarify and confirm to the electorate that First Past the Post is the term given to the current system used for voting in Members of Parliament to the House of Commons. In the context of the proposed question although ‘First Past the Post’ is presented as ‘current’ this was not readily drawn from the question, leaving people to question what the First Past the Post system was.

Spontaneous awareness of the term First Past the Post

Some of the respondents were familiar with the term and recognised it as a description for the current voting system to elect MPs. For others from across the sample (including those who had voted in general elections previously and those who had not) there was low familiarity with the term. Therefore, when asked by the moderator which words or phrases they did not feel confident to explain to another person, this was often chosen.

“First Past the Post is the party with the most number of seats in Parliament that is able to form a government...and the same in the constituencies, whoever gets the most votes out of the parties becomes the MP.”
[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, England]

“That’s our system now, that’s what we do at the moment.”
[30-50, AB, Redditch, England]

“Well, I didn’t know the name but I know that’s how we vote at the moment.”
[30-50, C1C2, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland]

“I think I have heard of it...in the last election that rings a bell.”
[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

“I have a vague idea what FPTP is – Conservatives would have gone into power with that at the last election.”
[21-29, AB, York, England]

“It sounds like rubbish, FPTP ... what post? I’m not interested in that anyway, to tell you the truth – I just want to go and vote.”
[30-50, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland, Low Literacy]

“First Past the Post – doesn’t mean anything to me.”
[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

Prompted understanding of the First Past the Post system

Once it was reiterated that First Past the Post was the name given to the current voting system, understanding increased about the process used to vote. Those who had voted in previous general elections tended to be very clear about the voting process and how it worked. However, even those who had not voted before were often spontaneously aware of the process, realising that in order to cast a vote they would need to put a cross next to the person (candidate) that they wished to vote for. Thus the information provided to describe this process did not inform respondents of anything new but was rather a helpful reminder.

"You've got the different boxes and you tick which member [you want]."
[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

In terms of how a candidate wins, most spontaneously suggested that a candidate would win by getting the most votes. This was occasionally discussed as getting a 'majority' (with an understanding that this meant getting the most votes). Whilst most understood that this was how the process worked, and acknowledged that the stimulus (which described this) confirmed their understanding, a few did raise questions about this process. This tended to be due to confusion around a candidate winning in a constituency and a Government gaining the most seats in the House of Commons. As such, it was questioned why there was a hung parliament in the recent general election and why the Conservative Party did not win if it was the party with the most votes that should win. In addition, a few were surprised that a winning candidate did not need to win a specific proportion of the total votes cast.

"Why have you got a hung parliament then, surely the Tories should have won last time."

[30-50, C1C2, London, England, Low Literacy]

"It's the one that gets the majority wins."

[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

4.1.3 Communicating the First Past the Post system

Whilst the main focus of this research was on understanding how well the respondents understood the proposed question, discussion from this sample highlighted what information could be helpful to the electorate to educate and inform them on this referendum:

- That First Past the Post is the name/term given to describe the current system of voting
- Describing *at a constituency* level that this means the candidate with the most votes wins
- An explanation of how this is different to gaining a number of seats in Parliament and that a majority is required, i.e. a majority of seats is needed to form a government
- Using visual representation - although this was not essential (as for many this was a familiar way of voting), it was felt that it may still be useful to see at a

glance (especially if comparing the system with the Alternative Vote system – discussed later)

“I think anything visually to help you see it in your mind would help [all agree].”

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“I think the diagrams are quite handy for people who aren’t quite sure. It makes it quite clear at a glance, rather than them having to look and read.”

[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

4.1.4 Understanding of Alternative Vote system

Overall

As mentioned, amongst this sample there was little spontaneous awareness or knowledge of the Alternative Vote system. This lack of knowledge affected their ability to answer the proposed question, since without understanding this system they were not able to make an informed choice.

Therefore, in order to ensure the electorate understand fully the referendum question it will be important to educate them about the Alternative Vote system.

Spontaneous awareness and understanding of the Alternative Vote term and system

A few respondents had heard of this system, although only a couple knew exactly what it meant. These respondents were typically those who were more engaged in the political system; for example, one had looked it up on the BBC website after hearing that a referendum may be called. For most of the sample however the Alternative Vote system was not familiar nor understood.

“I’ve heard of the expression but I don’t really know what it is.”

[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

“I know what FPTP means, but the alternative vote system, I don’t really know. That’s quite a weird term ... I don’t know what it means.”

[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

“All of us here have heard the words ‘first past the post’ from election night I think, certainly people our age would know that. But what does alternative vote mean? I don’t really know.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

In the Welsh version of the question, the term ‘pleidlais amgen’ (alternative vote) was also not readily understood, again due to a lack of familiarity with this term.

“Beth yw’r pleidlais amgen ma? Fedrai siarad Cymraeg ond tydi hwnnw ddim yn gyfarwydd.”

“What’s this pleidlais amgen (alternative vote) thing? I can speak Welsh but that isn’t familiar.”

[50+, C1C2, Colwyn Bay]

For a few others who had heard of the term, there was sometimes an assumption that it was the same (or at least very similar to) Proportional Representation or that it involved some form of ranking system, but they were unsure of the detail. These respondents tended to be from Northern Ireland and Scotland.

“Is it the same as proportional representation, the alternative vote?”

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“There are several ways of voting – PR, vote transfer – so you wouldn’t necessarily know what the alternative vote was referring to.”

[30-50, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“It’s a little bit like the proportional representation that they did in the Scottish Parliament election.”

[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

Understanding the Alternative Vote system in the context of the proposed referendum question

In the context of the proposed referendum question, given that most respondents did not know what the Alternative Vote system is, a number of assumptions or guesses were made.

In the first instance, most respondents understood it meant something *different* to the current voting system given that they were being asked to choose this to replace the First Past the Post system.

Assumptions about the exact nature of the difference, however, varied. These included:

- A different **channel** will be used to enable voters to place their votes, for example, online, postal voting or even through the TV. This was often suggested by the younger respondents and was often borne out of a perception that people were unable to cast their vote in the last general election because of the queues. In addition, younger voters claimed that it might be to help increase the number of people voting by making voting more accessible.
- A **different** system of voting (to what is used currently) but not a 'specific' system. This assumption was based on the term 'alternative' which indicated to some respondents a 'different' way of voting rather than an actual system per se. In this case, respondents believed they were being asked about change in principle and the alternative system was still to be defined.

"Yeah I know what that means, it's like a postal vote or something."

[21-29, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland, Low literacy]

"I think you'd still have to mark x, but maybe not literally go down to the actual place – maybe you'd be able to x it on the computer, x it on your phone, so you don't actually have to leave your house."

[21-29, DE, London, England]

"I just thought 'alternative vote' was to a different way of voting, an umbrella statement."

[50+, AB, London, England]

"Are they looking for an alternative vote or have they already got one? Why would they have already come up with an alternative way to vote without asking the public first?"

[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

"In the past we've been asked to do something different, rate the order..but I don't remember what it was called."

[30-50, AB, Dunfermline, England]

Many of the respondents, however, were unable to even hazard a guess as to what the Alternative Vote was or meant.

"I haven't got the foggiest... "

[30-50, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland, Low literacy]

Prompted understanding of the Alternative Vote system

The respondents were shown an explanation of the Alternative Vote system (see Appendix 4) which was designed to help them to understand how the system worked.

The two different elements included in this explanation were:

- How you cast a vote
- How candidates win a seat

How you cast a vote

Once shown the process of casting a vote under the Alternative Vote system, most were able to understand that it was a ranking system. A few respondents were familiar with the idea of ranking candidates; for example, some Welsh respondents stated they had ranked candidates in past elections. In addition, Scottish and Northern Irish respondents recognised this as an approach used in local or other elections.

Although most could understand in principle how this would work, a key question was if they had to rank all of the candidates and consequently end up voting for a candidate they did not wish to.

“What if you want to choose just one... “
[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

“You’ve got two or three parties that you like, and you pick 1,2,3, even if you only want two?”

[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

“But you could get forced into picking people you don’t necessarily want to pick, because you have to rate them, so no. Could you just vote for the one you wanted anyway, and leave the rest blank? That to me would just be the same as now, so would you need to rate them? People can’t be forced.... ”

[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

How candidates win a seat

There was little or no spontaneous understanding of how candidates would win a seat. When respondents understood that a voter would be asked for their second, third or further choices there was some recognition that these choices would be taken into consideration. However, exactly how this would be the case was not readily understood.

Responses of a few highlighted that there could be some confusion about what the voters’ numbers stood for; for example, some people thought that those with a ‘high’ number would count as the favourites and those with a low number would be the least favourite. Some were also confused about how the ‘numbering’ would be used and counted.

Some respondents considered the use of a 'points' system whereby each 'position' would be allocated some form of points and the candidate with the most points would win. Others were simply unsure how further choices would count.

"They're telling you that you can put a one here and four here, why are they telling people to do that, it means that you are giving one vote to him and two (votes) to him, three votes to him and four (votes) to him – I would say that's confusing.."

[17-20, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

Once respondents were taken through the explanatory materials, and often a discussion with the moderator, most understood how the system worked. However, it was difficult to comprehend, with some respondents often requiring several explanations to generate understanding. Areas that were particularly difficult to convey were:

- How the preferences were taken into consideration and re-allocated
- 'Majority' of votes – as some struggled to understand what this meant.

"Now you've explained about that preference part of AV, I know what you mean but I wouldn't have got their on my own...it takes a while to digest it."

[30-50, DE, East Yorkshire, England, Low Literacy]

Visuals to demonstrate the different stages of the count were felt helpful for respondents to understand how redistribution of preferences works.

"That was quite tricky actually...that seems a much more complicated way of sorting out the votes...but...at the same time it might be good in that you can pick a number of preferences."

[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

"Does that mean that some of the votes aren't counted? If someone's already got over 50%, do they use all the votes up i.e. keep on counting, or is it just as soon as they get there [over 50% line] that's it, nobody else's vote counts."

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

Additional questions around the Alternative Vote

Although the explanatory information was helpful for respondents in developing their understanding of the process, a number of questions arose in relation to this system. The answers to these questions were felt to be necessary for the respondents to be able to respond confidently to it.

Critically, many respondents wanted to know the pros and cons of the two different systems: they wished to understand in more detail what the *implications* of the two different systems are before they could decide which one to vote for. This information is also important to ensure assumptions about implications are correct. For example, some assumed the Alternative Vote would reduce the need for a coalition as there was less likely to be a hung parliament with this method (an assumption of why it was being put forward as an option). Others, however, felt that it might increase the chances of a coalition.

“You can’t make a decision just on the basis of how the system works, you have to know what the implications are. Obviously with First Past The Post, you would know, because we’ve had it for a few years, but you need to understand what will happen, and how things will be run if this new system [AV] comes into play.”

[21-29, AB, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“I’d like them to explain what the outcome was, when the votes were counted, so there wasn’t a hung parliament, so people knew who they were voting for [if it changed]. We’re confused enough to know who to vote for in the first place – the alternative system might not make any difference.”

[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

“Does that not lead to a bigger chance of a coalition government?”

[21-29, AB, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

Some respondents were more aware of why the referendum had been proposed and recognised that it was an agreement of the coalition, but for many this was not known. As such many queried why this referendum was taking place.

“I think the Lib Dems want it because the smaller parties get a better chance of winning I think. But I don’t know what the system itself is.”

[30-50, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“Why would they want to do anything? Maybe they’ll be a lot more MPs.”

[30-50, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland, Low literacy]

"I want to know why are they doing this?"

[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

Other questions that participants raised in relation to this referendum were:

- Do other countries use this system and how does it work there?
- What would have happened in the last general election if this system had been used? Would the Conservative party have won?
- The costs of the Alternative Vote system (from a perception that it is going to require more work to 'count' and sort the votes)

Finally, some respondents were more cynical towards the referendum, perceiving that it made no difference which way they voted and that the new system might be brought in regardless.

"What happens if we say no, then nothing, the system stays the same. But if there's a low turnout for the referendum, then they'll argue that it wasn't legitimate and they'll do it again."

[30-50, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

4.1.5 Communicating the Alternative Vote system

Although the focus of this research was on understanding responses to the proposed question, it was clear that the Alternative Vote system was not readily understood by this audience and there is a need for information about the system. Responses from the research sample suggest that this would include:

- Clarification that the Alternative Vote system is a different voting system that we will be asked to vote on
- How voters cast a vote in this system; that is, ranking candidates but making it clear that they need only rank one candidate if they wish to
- How votes are counted and that preferences are taken into consideration and here is how
- Visuals to help support the explanations

“Pictures do help, even if I’m picking up a newspaper and there is a picture there, it prepares me for what I’m going to read. Pictures just support the words.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

4.1.6 Communication of the Referendum

Most of the respondents expected to be told about the different voting systems in advance of the referendum. There was an expectation of a wide range of different channels for information dissemination including TV advertising, leaflets, posters, the internet and on the reverse of the polling card. There was also an expectation that it would be covered by the media through various programmes and channels. Some also assumed that politicians and parties would get involved.

“It would probably be television campaigns and posters. You’d probably get the candidates coming out and standing at your door for half an hour. I would say it would just be advertising everywhere.”

[21-29 years, AB, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“Well, you’d expect it to be all over the media – Newsnight and all those programmes, they’d be endlessly debating it.”

[30-50 years, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“I think it would have to be on the media days and weeks before, to clear up the confusion maybe the government would do some kind of mail shot to everyone, making it clear what the alternative vote would be.”

[50+ years, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

In terms of communicating the referendum, questions that would be useful to answer included:

- Why the referendum has been called in the first instance
- What the referendum will involve, i.e. a choice between two *different* voting systems
- If possible, the implications of both systems, that is the likely outcomes of the different types of systems

For some respondents it was also felt helpful for information about the different systems to be available at the point of voting, for example as a poster or a leaflet available in the polling station. There were also some requests for information to be present on the ballot paper, especially as these were new systems. However, for

many this would be a simple reminder about what is current and what is new, rather than too much detail. There was a concern that too much detail would be distracting and difficult to take on board at the point of voting. (This point is discussed further in Section 4.3.)

For those with English as a second language, it was mentioned that it would be helpful for the information be available in other languages for example, Urdu and Hindi, given the complexity of the information and the likely struggle of some to understand in English. For Welsh speakers, it was expected that this information would be available in the Welsh language also.

"I read English ok, but I know others, friends and family who might struggle with this so it would be good for it to be in their own language like Hindi, Gujurati."

[30-50, AB, Leicester, England]

4.2 Response to the Proposed Question

4.2.1 Introduction

For around two thirds of the respondents, the proposed question was shown 'blind': that is, they were not given any preamble or information about the systems prior to being given the proposed question. As mentioned previously, this was in order to understand immediate responses to the question, without any prior influence.

The respondents were presented with the proposed question in the look and layout of a ballot paper, as follows:

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?</p>	
YES	
NO	

In Welsh language research only:

<p>Refferendwm ar y system bleidleisio ar gyfer etholiadau seneddol</p> <p>Pleidleiswch (X) unwaith yn unig</p>	
<p>Ydych chi am i'r Deyrnas Unedig ddilyn y system “pleidlais amgen” yn lle'r system gyfredol “y cyntaf i'r felin” ar gyfer ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ'r Cyffredin?</p>	
YDW	
NAC YDW	

Respondents were asked to complete the question and then respond to a number of different questions following this using a self-completion exercise. (See Appendix 1).

Initial findings from the research indicated that many were unfamiliar with the terms used to describe the voting systems and that low awareness of the systems often prevented them from being able to answer the question (see below). Therefore, in order to understand how the question was understood once respondents knew more about the systems⁴, the remaining third of the sample were given a definition of the two different systems prior to seeing the proposed question.

4.2.2 Response to the proposed question tested

For many respondents, as long as they understood what First Past the Post and Alternative Vote were they felt that the proposed question was relatively straightforward and clear.

This was indicated when:

- They had seen the information about the systems prior to seeing the question
- They had reflected upon the question after they had seen the information
- Or some spontaneously commented when they saw the question 'blind' that if they knew what the two systems were then it would be straightforward to answer

"Now that I know what they are the question is straightforward, although I would want to do a lot more research before answering."

[30-50, AB, Redditch, England]

"Easy 'cos I now know what Alternative Vote means, but had I not known I wouldn't know what to do."

[30-50, AB, Dunfermline, Scotland]

"The question is clear, it's just that you don't understand what those terms mean."

[50 +, AB, London, England]

Some respondents (for example, some of those who were less engaged with the political system or some of those with low literacy or from a lower socio-economic group) however found the question hard work, requiring several re-reads to

⁴ To replicate to some extent how it might be understood once a public information campaign had taken place

understand it and sometimes further help. The reasons for this were that the question felt long, contained unfamiliar words and felt formal in its approach (see later) - and thus being certain about which response to give was not always straightforward.

“Can you explain? I don’t understand...it is complicated.”
[50+, DE, London, England, Low literacy]

Indeed, a small number of individuals gave a different answer from the one they had intended to give. This included people who had seen the information about the systems prior to reading the question.

“Mae hwn yn glir i mi. Os na i votio yn fanna [yn y bocs Ydw], tydi nhw ddim yn mynd i newid o. [hwylusydd yn esbonio bod hyn yn anghywir]. Oh! I understand now. Nes i ddim ddarllen o’n iawn. Tydio ddim yn glir, nacydi? Mae’n anodd i’w ddeall.”

“This is clear to me. If I vote there [in the Yes box], they won’t change it will they? [facilitator explains that this is not correct]. Oh! I understand now. I didn’t read it right. It’s not clear. It’s difficult to understand.”
[50+, DE, Colwyn Bay, Wales]

“Yes I ticked yes, but as I go through this I’m thinking I don’t really understand it, so I think I would tick no now or even don’t know.”
[30-50, AB, Leicester, England]

“This is just confusing me...it’s too complicated. What do I answer yes or no?”
[17-20, C1C2, Leicester, England, Low Literacy]

“Oh I’ve made a mistake...I’ve said yes but I wanted First Past the Post.”
[30-50, DE, Dunfermline, Scotland]

“Yes, yes, I understand [then respondent puts ‘wrong’ answer down].”
[50+, DE, London, England, Low literacy]

As discussed in detail above, for nearly all respondents, there was a lack of understanding about what Alternative Vote and First Past the Post mean. Therefore, when they were shown the question without any preamble or additional information on the systems many struggled to be able to respond; or when they did it was in the context of a lack of information or incorrect assumptions about the Alternative Vote system.

Specifically, whilst some were aware that they were being asked to vote between two voting systems many of the respondents felt that they could not respond to the

question when asked to do so, as they did not understand the different systems, particularly the Alternative Vote system.

"I'm sorry I can't respond I don't understand what Alternative Vote is."
[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

Others were less clear they were being asked to choose between two voting systems; rather they assumed that it was simply a vote for a change. Some respondents therefore gave a yes response to the question based on their own assumptions about the Alternative Vote system (which were often wrong). See earlier section 4.1.4 for detail.

"I voted 'yes', because I know there was a lot of confusion this time, and if it would make it clearer, then that's better, although I don't know what the alternative vote would be."
[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

"I answered yes because gathering from what happened this year, that anything is better than what happened this year – how people queued but then ten o'clock came, they got to the front and they got turned away."
[21-29, DE, London, England]

Some respondents also voted '**no**' simply because they did not know what the Alternative Vote system is.

"I did vote, but because I didn't know what the alternative was, I think it would probably be better to stick with what they have."
[30-50, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

"I think that's why I voted no, because I didn't understand and I thought they should have a footnote on what 'alternative vote' is."
[50+, AB, London, England]

"No, I don't think it's pushing them, but I don't think it's giving you a clear choice, because if you understand one [system] and not the other, you're going to take the one you understand."
[50+, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

Once informed about the different voting systems (for those respondents who were informed towards the end of the session), some respondents who had attempted to answer the question reflected back on their answers and felt that they would change them now that they were clearer about the systems.

"I'm not sure I'd answer the same way, because I'm not sure I like it now."

Furthermore, although the information provided respondents with an understanding about the 'process' of voting under the two different systems, some claimed they needed more information to enable them to make a vote.

This additional information need centred on understanding the benefits and drawbacks of each of the systems as well as understanding the potential implications of the new system; that is, what it will mean for the way a Government is likely to be formed or shaped.

"I can't answer this, I don't know what the pros and cons are of each."
[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

4.2.3 Response against the intelligibility criteria

1. Audience Accessibility

a) Ease of Understanding: Plain Language, familiar words, avoids jargon

Within their self-completion exercise respondents were asked to choose words to describe the proposed question. This was for those participants who had seen the question 'blind' and those that were given information about the systems prior to reading the proposed question. Across the sample a mix of words was chosen.

For those that saw the question 'blind', there was a mix of responses. Some respondents spontaneously chose words such as: *confusing, difficult to understand, too long, jargon and complicated* (more likely to be from a lower socio-economic group or those with low literacy). This was often linked to not understanding the Alternative Vote and First Past the Post systems. For some, it was also linked to other words which they were unfamiliar with and the length of the question (see below), which made the question more difficult to respond to and hard work.

"No, that means that let me think this right..... it just means that if everyone in the UK put an X, it means they don't want the UK let me read this again ... that means no, they don't want the UK to adopt theit means no, you don't want the UK to have it. Does that mean there would be no MPs then?"

[30-50, DE, Port Talbot, Wales, Low literacy]

For some other respondents however who saw the question ‘blind’, although they conceded they did not know what the Alternative Vote system was (and some did not know what First Past the Post system was), they viewed the question as being more straightforward, choosing words such as: *direct, clear, to the point, factual* and *easy to understand*.

These respondents felt the proposed question was easy to understand in itself - they just needed to understand what the two systems were before they could respond to the question.

“Yes that’s pretty straightforward really you just don’t know what the terms are.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

“Overall the question is direct, as long as you have the content of the terms it is working for me.”

[50+, C1C2, East Yorkshire, England]

“It’s to the point if you know what AV means.”

[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

Those respondents who saw the question *after* they had seen the explanations of the systems more often chose positive words to describe the proposed question, specifically: *easy to understand, straightforward, clear and simple*.

“Yes this question is easy to understand, when you know what these things mean.”

[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

That said, a few of these respondents still chose more negative words and found the question difficult to understand, again due to its length and the language used.

Welsh version:

There was also a mixed response amongst those who saw the Welsh version. Some respondents found it relatively straightforward and easy to understand (although again Alternative Vote was not understood), whereas others found it more difficult to understand because the language felt more formal. For many there was an expectation and request to have the English version alongside the Welsh.

“Wel, mae yna Cymraeg “posh posh” a Cymraeg mae pobl yn ei ddefnyddio. Wel, mae hwn yn Gymraeg mae pobl yn ei ddefnyddio. Dim jargon. Os ti’n cael rhai llythyrau yn y Gymraeg, mae nhw’n anodd, rhaid edrych yn y geiriadur. Does dim angen geiriadur ar gyfer hwn.”

“Well, there’s “posh posh” Welsh and Welsh that people use. This is Welsh that people actually use. No jargon. If you get letters in Welsh, they can be difficult, you need to look in a dictionary. You don’t need a dictionary for this one.”

[30-50, DE, Colwyn Bay, Wales]

Words that the participants did not understand

Respondents were also asked to note words or phrases that they felt they could not explain to others. Aside from Alternative Vote and First Past the Post very few words were chosen as not being understood. A few of the less politically engaged within the sample did not understand and were not familiar with the term ‘**House of Commons**’. A couple also did not understand or were less familiar with ‘**Members of Parliament**’ as a phrase.

“Members of Parliament, House of Commons, United Kingdom I don’t know what they’re talking about here at all.”

[17-20, C1C2, Port Talbot, Wales]

Other words were also picked out as not being ‘everyday language’ to some respondents:

- **‘Adopt’** – Although this word was understood by many, it was highlighted by some as not being plain everyday language. Furthermore it had other stronger connotations for some respondents (as in adopt a child) and therefore felt less relevant in this question. A few, however, were unsure of its meaning, especially in this context.

“‘Adopt’, that’s what Angelina Jolie does, people would think it meant that.”
[17-20, C1C2, Port Talbot, Wales]

“‘Adopt’ is something I’d change straightaway...it’s not everyday language, no one really uses ‘adopt’.”
[21-29, C1C2, Redditch, England]

“What is this word [pointing at ‘adopt’]?”
[50+, DE, London, England, Low literacy]

- A number of alternatives for use in place of ‘adopt’ were put forward:
 - ‘use’ was the most commonly suggested, being everyday language and to the point.
 - ‘change’ was also suggested, although a few respondents felt that this may also lead to a sense of bias one way or another, depending on how individuals were naturally predisposed to change (positively or negatively).

“Did they use that word [adopt] on purpose to try and confuse people?...Why don’t they use the word change.”
[21-29, DE, London, England]

“I would change ‘adopt’...I don’t like it, it’s a bit of a weird way of putting it...why not just have ‘use’.”
[17-20, DE, Derry, Northern Ireland]

“Why do they use the word adopt? They could just say ‘use’ or ‘have’.”
[50+, C1C2, East Yorkshire, England]

- In the Welsh version of the question the word ‘**dilyn**’, which means ‘follow’, was used instead of the Welsh word for adopt and one Welsh respondent queried why it was not the same as adopt (although this was not raised by other Welsh respondents). It was discussed however that the word ‘defnyddio’ (use) could be used instead.
- **‘Current’** – Although ‘current’ was understood, a few respondents considered that it felt formal. This view also emerged in relation to the Welsh version from some of the Welsh respondents; specifically the use of the word ‘cyfredol’. In both cases, the word ‘present’ or ‘presennol’ was felt to be more suitable.
- **‘Amgen’** - In the Welsh language version of the question, the word ‘**Amgen**’ (alternative) was less familiar or unfamiliar for some of the older Welsh respondents as this was not a word that they frequently used or came across. Some had to look at the English version in order to understand it.

“Amgen – doeddwn i erioed wedi iwsio’r gair. Dwi wedi clywed y gair, ond byth yn ei ddefnyddio.”

“Amgen (alternative) – I had never used that word. I have heard the word, but never use it.”

- **‘United Kingdom’** – Although this was understood, it was not usual vernacular for some respondents. This was not an issue in terms of understanding the question but it added to the formality of the tone. This was more often raised in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. It was sometimes suggested that either country (‘gwlad’ in Welsh) or ‘Great Britain’ (‘Prydain Fawr’ in Welsh) was used instead.

“Being Scottish I suppose some people would think the UK would be okay, but I would say Great Britain, it’s a bit more understandable.”

[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

- **‘House of Commons’** – For a few respondents this term was not common vernacular (in particular those in devolved countries – Scotland and Wales). Instead it was felt that ‘Westminster’, ‘London’ (‘San Steffan, London’) or ‘UK Parliament’ might be a better alternative.

“In the newspapers they don’t refer to it as the House of Commons, they refer to it as the UK Parliament”

[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

“If you took out House of Commons a lot more people would understand it or put the British Parliament. Because it can get confusing with the EU in place (MEPs) and the Scottish Parliament and the Parliament in Westminster.. Westminster is better than House of Commons.”

[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

- **‘Referendum’** – Some respondents highlighted that they did not understand the term ‘referendum’ in the title of the question and this needed to be explained.

b) Ease of Understanding: Short sentences

Some respondents did feel the question was too long. For some of these respondents it had an impact on their understanding. For example, it was observed through the fieldwork that some respondents often had to read the question several times in order to grasp what the question was asking of them and, more importantly, to be sure of which response they needed to give. Some of those with low literacy also required 'help' in understanding the question from the moderator. For others, although it did not necessarily impede their understanding, it was commented that the question could be written more succinctly.

"With that one I had to read it 3 or 4 times to make it click."
[30-50 years, AB, Leicester]

"There are too many words there in one batch they need to put it into proper grammar and so on. I look at that and think what's going on."
[30-50 years, DE, Leicester, London]

"I'm having a little trouble with it, only because it's quite long and I get lost in the middle."
[21-29, AB, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland, Low Literacy]

c) Ease of Understanding: Tone

Overall the tone of the question was felt to be formal and written by those who were more familiar with political terms and phrases. As such, it was suggested by some that it did not come across as everyday speech. Whilst this was not an issue for many, some felt that it made the question less accessible and harder to read. This was also mentioned in relation to the Welsh version by some of the older Welsh respondents, who felt that the tone and language within the question was not everyday, making it harder to read.

"Dwi'n credu os dach iawn os dach chi'n gweld iaith fel hyn bob dydd, ond i rywun cyffredin fatha ni, sydd ddim yn treulio amser yn edrych ar y news ac yn darllen am pethe' fel hyn, mae hi'n anodd."

"I believe you're OK if you see language like this every day, but to ordinary people like us, who don't spend time looking at the news or reading about things like this, it's hard."

[50+, C1C2, Colwyn Bay, Wales]

"If it was in plain English it would be easier – this is politicians speak. Who wrote this question up – a couple of MPs have sat down and written this?"
[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

'Do you want' as an introduction received a mixed response from the respondents and had an impact on the tone of the question. Positively, some respondents felt that it was more personal to have this as an introduction. However for others it felt a little aggressive and direct in tone.

"I think 'do you want' is a bit aggressive, I feel like I've been put on the spot."

[30-50, DE, London, Low literacy]

"Do you want' – I'm not sure that's the correct wording... 'would you like' or 'would you like to see a change' instead."

[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

"I like 'do you want' because it's personal to me, it's asking me directly."

[30-50, AB, Derry, Northern Ireland]

d) Layout and design

In terms of its layout, there were no significant issues which impacted on the intelligibility of the proposed question.

A few comments were made overall about the layout and these were as follows:

- A few respondents did comment on the boxes beneath the question which, due to the amount of white space in the 'yes' and 'no' boxes, were seen as a bit of a 'waste of space' and potentially making it more difficult to understand where to place the cross. These respondents suggested either removing the white space altogether or placing the 'yes' and 'no' text more centrally.
- A few also mentioned that it would be helpful to highlight (either by boldening or underlining) the phrases 'Alternative Vote' and 'First Past the Post' in order to show that these were the key elements of importance within the question. One respondent (Welsh speaking) suggested boldening "yn lle'r" instead to make it clear that the new system could be chosen instead of the current system.

- One person commented on the font (Times New Roman) being more difficult to read than other fonts, such as Arial.

“Maybe they could put FPTP and AV in bold or larger font, then they would stand out more, it might make it clearer.”

[50+, AB Drumahoe, Northern Ireland]

“Bold the important words, make them stand out.”

[30-50, AB, Redditch, England]

2. Focused and factual

a) Focused and factual: To the point

Most of the respondents felt that the proposed question was to the point and did not contain unnecessary words or phrases. However, a few respondents spontaneously suggested reducing the number of words by ‘shortening’ United Kingdom to UK and also Members of Parliament to MPs. In addition, a few felt that it was not necessary to include House of Commons.

“I don’t mind the question now that I know what it means, but instead of United Kingdom you could put UK, make it smaller and shorter.”

[21-29, DE, London, England]

“I thought it was really long...like the United Kingdom, we all know it’s UK.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

b) Focused and factual: Avoid assumptions

The key issue with the proposed question (in the absence of any communication about the different systems) is that nearly all stated that it made the assumption that the reader would understand what the two different systems are and be ready to make a decision on which one they wanted to vote for. As detailed earlier, the research clearly indicated that this is not the case at present.

3. Lack of bias

Much of the sample did not spontaneously think that the proposed question was biased in any direction.

"Fairly neutral I think, I can't see any bias really."

[21-29, C1C2, Redditch, England]

"No, not really, it's saying to adopt the new alternative voting system, they're not using anything positive or negative to describe it there, it's just basically telling you that there's a different option, and would you like it. I don't think it's biased in any way."

[21-29, AB, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

"I didn't think there was a slant ... I think it's quite neutral ... it's not biased one way or the other."

[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

"I don't feel it is biased – it's very direct...I don't feel it is trying to lead you one way or another."

[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

However a few respondents spontaneously mentioned that they felt that the question was somewhat biased towards the Alternative Vote system. In addition more respondents felt it was biased when asked to consider neutrality specifically and again this was typically in the direction of the Alternative Vote system.

"I think it was trying to get us to say a 'yes' ... just reading that.... they're trying to get us just to say 'yes', and shut you up..... you don't want to say you don't know [what you mean]."

[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

The reason for this sense of bias came variously from the following:

- Within the proposed question the Alternative Vote system is mentioned first. It was often discussed by respondents that there may be a bias towards whichever system was mentioned first.

"The question somewhat emphasises the Alternative Vote system, so there is a bit of nudge there, but if they asked the other way round, perhaps some people would be happy with FPTP, because if you know nothing about the other system, people are going to say there are perfectly happy aren't they?"

[50+, C1C2, Aberystwyth, Wales]

- For a few because the question required a yes or no response, it was felt that it suggested to the voter to make a 'yes' response.

“Yes I think that there is always some bias with questions like this. Where you are given an option for yes/no answer there is always someone who wants to answer ‘yes.’ I prefer the option with either or option and x marks your preference. I don’t know how you can word it without making it lead you in a certain direction.”

[50+, C1C2, East Yorkshire, England]

“Is the question trying to persuade me to answer in one way or the other? To be totally neutral you should have option 1 or option 2 and then tick a box. That would feel more fair...”

[21-29, AB, East Yorkshire, England]

- **‘Do you want’** and **‘adopt’** indicated for some that the Alternative Vote is the ‘preferred’ option by the ‘writer’; that is, the person posing the question already has intentions that they wish to put this particular system in place. For example, ‘adopt’ was suggestive of the Alternative Vote system being ready to be put into place (that is, ready to be ‘adopted’).

“And the word adopt as well, it’s like, let’s try something new.”

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“It leads to yes because it says adopt, and then it says alternative and everyone knowing what the current situation is will think yeah we don’t want this, let’s go to the next choice.”

[21-29, DE, London, England]

“I much prefer the word ‘use’ rather than adopt, again adopt suggests that they have already made their minds up...”

[50+, C1C2, East Yorkshire, England]

“The ‘Do you want’, to me, implies that others do want it and it’s asking if you want to go along with them...so people who don’t have all the facts might just go with what they think everyone else is doing.”

[30-50, AB, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland]

- **‘Instead of’** was suggestive for a few that the current system was not working as well as it should and therefore implying that the Alternative Vote may work better.

“Actually...I think it might be trying to get you to vote for the AV system...looking at it again now...the way they say ‘instead of’ – they may mean it’s not very good is it?! [i.e. FPTP]”

[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

“The more I think about it actually, the more I don’t like it. It’s actually a little bit leading using ‘instead of the current’.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

For a few other respondents, however, the question was felt to show some bias toward the First Past the Post system because it was presented as the current system – and people may feel disinclined to change.

4.3 Developing the Question

4.3.1 Introduction

Respondents were asked to suggest, if necessary, how they would improve or develop the question to make it as straightforward and easy to answer as possible, for example, they were asked to create their own version or adapt the proposed version.

4.3.2 Spontaneous suggestions

A number of spontaneous suggestions emerged through this process. The main suggestions made were as follows:

- Making a mark against the system that you wish to vote for, rather than a yes or no question, for example:

Which voting system would you prefer the UK to use to elect MPs to the House of Commons?

A) *Alternative Vote*
B) *First Past the Post*

“I think the clear thing is a choice between the two, rather than a yes or no...you walk out and you start questioning yourself...whereas if it’s a clear ‘this or this’, that’s how simple you want to do it.”

[30-50, AB, Dunfermline, Scotland]

“Why is it a yes or no question? Why doesn’t it just say which voting system do you prefer – alternative vote/first past the post and you tick one of those, rather than yes or no.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

“What’s most important is that the question is easy to read and easy to understand, and that how you answer it is obvious. If it’s a yes/no question you’re going to have to go back to the question to work out the answer. If

you just tick next to a box you know easily what box you're ticking and what that will mean."

[30-50, AB, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland]

- Using acronyms, like UK instead of United Kingdom and MPs instead of Members of Parliament, in order to shorten the question and match vernacular more closely, for example:

Do you want the UK to change to the "Alternative Vote" system instead of the current "First Past the Post" system for electing MPs to the House of Commons?

Yes

No

"A lot of people know that MP is Member of Parliament, so putting 'for electing MPs' rather than Members of Parliament, because a lot of people relate to MPs rather than 'Member of Parliament"

[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

"They could just write MPs."

[21-29, DE, London, England]

- Shortening the question in other ways, for example:
Do you want the UK to change from the First Past the Post system to the Alternative Vote system? Yes or No

- Splitting the question into two sentences.

"I would split it out...it's all one long sentence now, make it two or three and separate them so it's easier to read."

[21-29, AB, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland, Low literacy]

- For some, there was a request for a brief description of the systems on the ballot paper to remind people of the difference between the two systems.

"I think they need an explanation of the systems on the ballot paper as well...as a lot of people will not be aware of what the current system is called."

[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

- Some respondents wanted to put First Past the Post first, as this was felt to be more neutral.

4.3.3 Response to the alternative questions

Respondents were asked to consider alternative questions either before their spontaneous suggestions or after. These alternative questions were based on suggestions from the pilot groups and also from a plain language expert. The purpose of showing these to respondents was to understand what elements, if any, helped to make the question more simple or straightforward to understand.

In total, four different versions of the question and one abbreviated version were shown to the respondents after the pilot phase. Given the time constraints of the sessions, all five were not shown to all respondents. In order to ensure a good spread of exposure to, and discussion of, the four different alternatives, the questions were rotated across the research sessions. Specifically, in each session, respondents were shown at least two versions of the question and they were shown more where time allowed. The abbreviated version was also shown where the issue of abbreviations was raised or if time allowed. Overall coverage of the different questions was broadly even across the sessions.

These versions comprised of:

- A version with two sentences
- A different version with two sentences
- A version which contained more detailed information about the systems
- A version which asked the voter to make a mark against First Past the Post or Alternative Vote instead of a yes or no response.
- An abbreviated version of the proposed question

For all these questions (aside from the detailed version), participants needed to understand what the Alternative Vote is and, for some, First Past the Post, in order to be able to respond confidently to the question. However, a couple of the alternative questions worked more strongly than the others, in that they were felt to convey the information clearly and were therefore more accessible.

1. Two sentences (version 1)

This question was based on a suggestion made to the Electoral Commission by a plain English group that the question should be divided into two shorter sentences. Use of the word ‘method’ rather than ‘system’ was also suggested.

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>At present the United Kingdom uses the “first past the post” method to elect Members of Parliament to the House of Commons. Should the “alternative vote” method be used instead?</p>	
<p>YES</p>	
<p>NO</p>	

a) Accessibility

A few respondents felt that this was very similar to the proposed question, in so much as they cited that it was still long and had the same types of words. For many respondents, however, this version of the question came across as clearer. A number of elements in this version of the question helped to make it feel more accessible and straightforward than the proposed question, as follows:

- The use of two short sentences helped to make the information easier to digest and this helped to increase general understanding.

“It seems easier to understand - maybe the full stop has something to do with that. But it seems it would be harder for somebody to be confused, or even quickly say ‘yes’ when they meant ‘no.’”

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

- The content of the two sentences was also felt to be helpful. The first sentence was felt to be informative, helping the reader to understand the ‘status quo’ and that First Past the Post is the term given to the method that is currently used. This helped to overcome the confusion that some of the respondents had in relation to understanding First Past the Post. (As discussed, this was often missed in the proposed version). The second sentence was felt to be a straightforward question to understand.

“Mae hwnna’n hawdd, haws na’r llall [y cwestiwn gwreiddiol]. Nes i ddarllen hwnna ac i ddallt o. Falle gan bod o’n deud be da ni’n gwneud ar y funud. Mae’n fwy syml. Dwi’n ddallt hwnna’n syth a dwi’n meddwl fasa lot o bobl r’un fath. Y cynta’ na roeddwn i’n gorfod i ddarllen o dwn im faint o weithiau.”

“That’s easy, easier than the other one [the proposed question]. I read it and I understood it. Maybe because it says what we do at the moment. It’s simpler. I understand that one straight away and I think it would be the same for a lot of people. The first one I had to read I don’t know how many times.”

[50+, AB, Colwyn Bay, Wales]

“It’s more informative because on this one [proposed question] it didn’t even tell you that first past the post was how we do it now, whereas this one does.”

[21-29, DE, London, England]

The language in this version felt straightforward and everyday. In particular, respondents often liked the phrasing “*should the....*” which was felt very to the point and objective. Furthermore, “*At present*” was also felt to be very straightforward and direct. In addition, a few respondents picked up on the word *method*, which they preferred over *system* as it was felt to be an easier word to understand; although this was not readily mentioned by others. In terms of the Welsh version, the younger respondents that saw this version did not make any comment about the use of ‘*dylid/na ddylid*’ (should and it shouldn’t) instead of *ydw/nac ydw* (yes/no).

“I think it’s much better, it’s got rid of the ‘instead of the current’...it was sort of hinting they don’t like the current first past the post.”

[50+, AB, London, England]

“It’s a bit easier to read, because it doesn’t have ‘adopt’, for example.”

[30-50, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“It is easier [than the proposed question], because it’s saying “at present” FPTP is in place should another method be used instead. The word there [proposed question], ‘do you want’, and this says ‘should’, the first one [proposed question] is slightly pushy, this one’s not as pushy. And it’s [proposed question] not saying that the current one that’s in place is FPTP -

most people know that it's the one that's in, but it's telling you so it's a lot clearer that they're asking you, do you want a different system."
[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

"It says 'at present' so it's telling you what system we have at the moment."
[50+, C1C2, Dunfermline, Scotland]

b) Focused and Factual

The question was perceived as factual and to the point – providing a clear indication that First Past the Post is the current system.

c) Lack of Bias

Overall, this question was not seen as particularly biased in either direction. Further, some participants felt that it was seeking their opinion rather than implying how they should respond. A few participants did, however, feel that it was biased towards First Past the Post, as this method was mentioned first within the question. A few others felt it was biased towards the Alternative Vote system.

"It is asking the same thing as the first question. I like it a lot more, it feels like it is asking your opinion more than the first question. The word 'method' I like..."

[21-29, AB, East Yorkshire, England]

"It's as biased as the old [proposed] one, it's still using the same terms, FPTP and alternative vote, they've just switched them round."

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

"It's the same, only worded differently. I would say you get the feeling it's a bit biased in that you should adopt the alternative vote. It makes it seem like it's something new and attractive to people, the way forward. Only because it says 'at present'. So it would push you towards saying yes."

[21-29, AB, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

2. Two sentences (version 2)

This question used the same approach as version 1, but used the wording 'a system called...' (suggested by a participant in a pilot group) to see if this helped identify that the Alternative Vote system is a specific system rather than a generic different system.

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>At present the United Kingdom uses a system called “first past the post” to elect Members of Parliament to the House of Commons. Should a system called the “alternative vote” be used instead?</p>	
YES	
NO	

a) Accessibility

Overall, this version of the question had some of the same benefits as the first of the two sentence versions, namely:

- The use of two short sentences helped to make the information easier to digest and this helped to increase general understanding.
- The content of the two sentences was also felt to be helpful.

“This is better because of the way its worded – it’s telling you straightforward that first past the post is what we have the moment. ‘Should’ feels like more of a question rather than they are telling you [in the proposed question].”
[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

However, reference within this question to ‘a system called’ was not particularly helpful to the respondents. This focus on the ‘naming’ of the system was considered distracting and meant that the respondent focused more on the name of the system changing rather than the system itself.

*“This one seems like you’re just changing the name [of the system] so it stays the same, but just with a different name. So maybe if they say ‘should **another**, or a **different**, system called AV be used.’”*

“What’s all this about ‘system called’...is it that system or not? Why does it say it’s called this, that implies it might actually be something else?”

[30-50, AB, Redditch, England]

Further, some of the older Welsh respondents who saw this version in Welsh commented that ‘dylid/na ddylid’ (should and it shouldn’t) were less familiar than ‘ydw’ and ‘nac ydw’ (yes and no).

b) Focused and Factual

As with the other two sentence version, the question was perceived as factual and to the point – providing a clear indication that First Past the Post is what the current system is called. As highlighted above, a ‘system called’ was not felt necessary.

c) Lack of Bias

Again, this question was not seen as particularly biased in either direction. Indeed, it was perceived by some to be engaging with voter opinion more explicitly (rather than hinting that the system was already decided).

3. More detailed version

This question included a lengthy preamble explaining how a vote is cast and how a seat is won in each system, in response to requests from some participants in the pilot stage for there to be more information on the systems included on the ballot paper.

**Referendum on the voting system
for parliamentary elections**

‘First past the post’ system

‘First past the post’ is the system used at the moment for electing MPs to the House of Commons.

In this system, each voter marks the ballot paper with an X by the candidate they want to elect.

All the votes are counted and the candidate with the most votes is elected.

‘Alternative vote’ system

‘Alternative vote’ is a different system from the one used at the moment for electing MPs to the House of Commons

In this system, each voter numbers the candidates on the ballot paper in order of preference. The voter puts a ‘1’ by their first choice candidate, a ‘2’ by their second choice candidate, and so on.

All the first choice votes are counted. If one candidate has more than half of the votes, they are elected. If no candidate has more than half of the votes, the candidate with the fewest votes is eliminated from the counting. The second choice votes of people who had voted for the eliminated candidate are redistributed to the remaining candidates. This process is repeated until one candidate has more than half of the votes and they are elected.

Question

Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?

Vote (X) once only

YES

NO

a) Accessibility

Whilst some respondents valued this information (especially when they had not been given information upfront about the different systems), most found that this alternative question was far too detailed and information heavy.

Respondents reflected that this level of detail on a ballot paper (and in the context of a voting booth) would be too overwhelming to read in that situation. This perception was evident across much of the sample but in particular for the low literacy respondents. They often felt that they would really struggle if they were faced with this at the polling station as it would feel too stressful to try to read through and take on board.

“This would just be too much, it would make me quite stressed and I’d really struggle with this in that situation.”

[30-50, C1C2, London, England, Low literacy]

“The last paragraph would get me confused – I know what the words mean, but I get confused as I’m reading it.”

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

“Do I have to read all of this?!”

[21-29, AB, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland, Low Literacy]

“I couldn’t read all that, I’d be so nervous and I’d be too scared to ask someone to help me.”

[30-50, DE, London, Low Literacy]

Across the sample more generally, it was felt likely that if presented with this information voters may not read it thoroughly and were more likely to skim over it or not reach the end of the explanation.

“I think I would be concerned about that because you’re rushed in and rushed out of polling stations, so you may not have the opportunity to actually read the thing, and then you go up and think, oh, what’s this and there’s a mob behind you, and people just think, I’ll just write down anything, just to get out of the door.”

[50+, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

“Too much - I’m only going to vote, I don’t want to read loads of rubbish.”

[30-50, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland, Low Literacy]

“Panic. Ie. Tisho brysio ond ti moin ddarllen o’n gywir i wneud yn siwr amdano, yr holl point o droi i fyny ydi cymryd rhan, a byswn i yn really grac

os fyswn i yn mynd o na yn meddwl fyd mod i wedi deall y cwestiwn a wedyn darllen ar yr Internet bo' fi wedi cael o'n rong."

"Panic. Yes. You want to be quick but you want to read it properly to be sure about it, the whole point of turning up is to take part, and I would be really annoyed if I went from there thinking I had understood the question and then read on the internet that I had got it wrong."

[21-29, C1C2, Aberystwyth, Wales]

"I mean seriously when all you want to do is go in and put a 'X' down, are you going to read all that? I doubt it."

[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

In addition, the question at the bottom of the paper was somewhat lost within the overall information, which made it more difficult to access.

"The last paragraph would get me confused – I know what the words mean but I get confused as I read it."

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

Overall, respondents felt that a better solution would be to supply information prior to the referendum.

"To me, that's like a leaflet that should be put through people's doors. If you have this through your door, and you're bombarded with an information campaign telling you what each system is, you don't need this."

[30-50, C1C2, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

b) Focused and Factual

By providing the reader with the information about the systems this question did not presume that the reader knew about the systems. However this question, whilst factual, did not feel particularly focused given the extent of the information attached to it.

c) Lack of Bias

Whilst there was a not a strong sense of bias with this question, some respondents questioned whether, given the amount of detail provided about the Alternative Vote system, respondents would actually read this, thereby concluding that they may instead simply vote for First Past the Post. A few also mentioned that without information about the implications of the systems, the information provided was still somewhat lacking.

4. Mark against First Past the Post or Alternative Vote

This question provided the two voting systems, rather than ‘yes’ and ‘no,’ as answer options, in response to suggestions from some participants at the pilot stage.

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Which voting system do you want the United Kingdom to use for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?</p>	
<p>‘Alternative vote.’ This is a different system from the one that is used at the moment</p>	
<p>‘First past the post’ This is the system that is used at the moment</p>	

a) Accessibility

This alternative question was found to be very clear to answer by most of the respondents. Even for those who accepted that the proposed question was relatively straightforward and clear, this alternative version was often seen as much more

straightforward, clear and unambiguous. A few low literacy respondents at first glance felt that there was a little too much to read, although conceded that on further reading the question was easier to respond to.

"I like that one the best [all agree], there's just no room for misinterpretation there, as long as you know what the terms mean."

[21-29, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

"That question's more easier to understand, because it tells you what 'alternative' means, it's a different system from what they're using."

[21-29, E, Glengormley, Northern Ireland, Low Literacy]

The key reason for this question being perceived as straightforward was the fact that the voter would be placing a mark directly next to the choice they wished to make. By doing this, it was felt that there would be no sense of ambiguity about what the voter had chosen, which was felt to be more likely in the proposed question. Instead, it was felt to be a very straightforward choice. A few individuals stated they preferred to tick a yes or no box as they had strong feelings about which response they wished to give and this felt like a stronger statement to make. However, for these individuals, this version of the question was not difficult to respond to.

The question itself was also felt to be straightforward to understand because of the everyday language used.

"It's probably the best I've read so far, because it's so simplistic to understand - yes, that one for me. It gives you two categories as well, as opposed to yes/no. So you would say, right, I know I want that one, I don't want this one, it's giving you the two voting systems, so I would easily understand this one, as opposed to these two here [proposed question and version 1], it's just 'pick one'."

[30-50, C1C2, East Renfrewshire, Scotland]

"As long as they knew what that [AV] meant, but I think if they asked this, people would tick that one [FPTP], because they know what it is. But it's an easier question to understand, because it's asking them to choose between two systems."

[50+, DE, Glengormley, Northern Ireland]

"I don't mind the first question, the yes/no way of putting it, but this one is perhaps a little clearer."

[21-29, C1C2, Redditch, England]

"I like the tick box, what your marking down correlates to the box next to it, whereas with the yes/no question you have to refer back to the question to find out whether you want to answer yes or no...With ticking you just tick next to the system you want."

[30-50, AB, Drumahoe, Northern Ireland]

Mae hwn yn fwy cyffredin. Fel bod rhywun gweddol cyffredin wedi sgwennu fo.”

“This is more ordinary. It’s as if someone pretty ordinary has written it.”
[50+, C1C2, Colwyn Bay, Wales]

“This cuts it down a bit nicely, this is more common’s man talk, the first one was a bit long”
[30-50, DE, Leicester, England]

The additional information next to the systems, for example, *First Past the Post – this is the system that is used at the moment*, was felt to be useful and helpful for some, making it clear that First Past the Post is the system used currently and that the Alternative Vote is a different system, thereby being a useful reminder. For a few others, however, this information was felt to add little to the question (particularly the information provided on the Alternative Vote) and there were requests instead for a little more detailed information. For a few (especially those with low literacy) there were concerns that any further additional information may become too much and make the question overwhelming to read.

“Fantastic – explains it all to me – that’s fine. It’s explaining it to me, it’s telling me what alternative vote is, and it’s telling me what FPTP is, and it’s asking me which voting system do you want, so I totally understand all that, it’s explaining, not expecting me to know what they mean.”
[30-50, DE, East Renfrewshire, Scotland, Low Literacy]

“I like it how it is just the main question, and again you have the two different voting systems described...with some more elaboration...”
[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

The explanation here of the systems is rubbish. If they improved those explanations then that would be fine...it’s to the point otherwise – very straightforward.”
[30-50, DE, Aberystwyth, Wales]

There were also a few respondents who stated that they wanted to put a tick (rather than a cross) in the box as a positive affirmation of which system they were choosing. However, this was not raised by the other respondents.

b) Focused and Factual

This version of the question felt very straightforward and to the point. Mentioning that First Past the Post was the system used at the moment and the Alternative Vote was a different system was felt to be a helpful reminder by many.

There were some preferences to place First Past the Post first in the list, as this is the system that is currently in place.

c) Lack of bias

This alternative question was generally not considered to contain any inadvertent bias due to the fact that the question was asking the reader to pick one of the systems rather than responding yes or no. That said, a few did mention that due to the reference of 'at the moment' in relation to First Past the Post, this may encourage voters to stick with the current system.

Where this was the case, a few respondents felt that it would be better just to place the systems' names on the paper with no further information in relation to them, in order to avoid any inadvertent bias. For example, it was perceived that stating something was the current system may incline some voters to 'stick with what they know'.

5. Abbreviated version

This question uses the abbreviations 'UK' and 'MPs' in response to suggestions from participants in the pilot stage of the research.

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Do you want the UK to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing MPs to the House of Commons?</p>	
<p>YES</p>	
<p>NO</p>	

a) Accessibility

For some respondents this ‘shortened version’ helped to make the question more succinct which helped to increase their inclination to read it.

That said, the Welsh language shortened version with the acronyms DU (UK) and ASau (MPs) was slightly more confusing for the Welsh respondents (especially for the older respondents). They were less familiar with these shortened terms in Welsh and therefore felt that that they did not help to make the question more straightforward. In particular, DU (UK) is also the Welsh word for black. The Welsh language respondents noted that using abbreviations was not the normal way of doing things in Welsh.

In addition, some English respondents also felt that, whilst it made the question shorter, it was not essential to help make the question clearer.

“DU? Fasa neb yn gwybod. Falle os dach chi’n wych yn y Gymraeg. Os faswn i n mynd i fy ngwr a deud “beth yw DU”, sa fo hefo dim syniad.”

“DU (UK)? Nobody would know. Maybe if you were amazing in Welsh. If I went to my husband and asked him what DU(UK) meant, he wouldn’t have a clue.”

[50+, C1C2, Colwyn Bay, Wales]

“Pob tro dwi’n gweld AS, mae’n rhaid i fi feddwl. Mae’r termau MP a UK yn cael ei ddefnyddio lot yn Saesneg, tydi DU ac AS ddim yn cael ei defnyddio r’un fath. Mae’n bwysig cael y termau llawn.”

“Every time I see AS (MP), I have to think. The terms MP and UK are used a lot in English, but DU and AS don’t get used the same. It’s important to include the full terms.”

[21-29, AB, Aberystwyth, Wales]

b) Focused and Factual

Reducing the word count by using these acronyms did help to make the question more focused for some respondents, as mentioned above.

c) Lack of Bias

As with the proposed question, there was no strong spontaneous feeling of bias in this question; however, on questioning, there was some sense that this question was more biased towards the Alternative Vote system, for the same reasons as provided for the proposed question above.

V Conclusions and Recommendations

5.1 Context

- This research indicates that the voting public are not aware of and do not understand the Alternative Vote system at present. In addition, the term First Past the Post is not familiar to many as the term for the current system.
- Given this lack of knowledge, it will be vital for information about these different systems to be conveyed to the voting public in advance of the referendum. Without this information, indications from this research are that the voting public will either feel they are not able to cast a vote or they will vote based on their assumptions about the Alternative Vote system - which are typically not correct.
- The key information for explanation is the *voting process*: that is, both how votes are cast and how a candidate wins for both types of voting system. Responses to stimulus material indicated that explanatory information would ideally include visual aids to help explain the process (particularly important for describing the Alternative Vote system in terms of how votes are re-distributed).
- If possible, it will also be helpful to inform the electorate on:
 - The differences between the two systems – many respondents would ideally like to see a ‘neutral’ pros and cons of the systems
 - The likely implications of the new system and how this might compare to the current system
 - The reason for the referendum and why a change to the system is being considered

Some participants were also interested in whether the Alternative Vote system is currently used in other countries and how it works in them.

5.2 Response to the Proposed Question

- Based on the assumption that the voting public will be made aware of the different systems prior to seeing the referendum question, findings suggest that, for many people, the proposed question will be generally understood, if the appropriate information is provided. However, it was difficult to understand for some individuals, who struggled to answer the question in the way they intended even once they had been informed about the systems. In addition a small number of the sample failed to answer the question the way they wanted to.

- Evaluating the question against the intelligibility criteria, overall responses suggest:

Accessible?

- The proposed question was generally considered simple and clear and relatively straightforward to understand. However, some of the language used did not feel everyday (for example, adopt) for some respondents which made it more difficult to understand. Furthermore, a small number of participants in the sample (those with low literacy and from a lower socio-economic group) did not answer the question in the way that they intended; they misread the question and did not vote for the outcome they wanted to.

Factual and focused?

- For many respondents the proposed question felt to the point. Some did feel, however, that the question was too long, requiring them to read it several times in order to ensure they had understood it correctly. Thus they looked for ways to shorten it.

Lack of bias?

- Most respondents did not spontaneously suggest the proposed question was biased in any direction. A few, however, did spontaneously suggest a slight sense of bias toward the Alternative Vote system.

- With this in mind, although many claimed the question was relatively straightforward to answer, once they knew what the Alternative Vote and First

Past the Post systems were, it was often suggested, both spontaneously and after prompting, that the question could be made simpler still.

5.3 Potential considerations for the Question

- If the proposed 'yes or no' question is to be used, there are some small adjustments that may help to make it more straightforward and potentially reduce any sense of bias. These include
 - Changing the word '*adopt*' to '*use*' (*defnyddio*)
 - Consider changing '*do you want*' to '*should*'
 - Change '*current*' to '*present*' (*presennol*)
- Two of the alternative questions shown were felt to be more straightforward and clear to answer than the proposed question, although it should be noted that the alternative questions were not considered in as much detail as the proposed question.
- The two sentence alternative version of the question (version 1) was often regarded as more straightforward than the proposed question for a number of reasons and as such felt more accessible.
- Overall, however, the version which asks the voter to tick which system they would prefer, rather than a yes or no option, was the most straightforward, clear and unambiguous approach for most of the respondents, including those with low literacy.
- Additional information on the ballot paper in relation to the different systems was requested by some respondents. However, describing the systems is not necessarily straightforward and there is the potential to overwhelm the electorate with too much detail. An alternative solution may be a simple reminder of the two systems, for example First Past the Post is the system used at the moment and Alternative Vote is a different system.

* * * * *

Appendices

APPENDICES

1. Self Completion Exercise
2. Discussion Guide
3. Explanation of First Past the Post System
4. Explanation of Alternative Vote System
5. Alternative Questions – Welsh (Please note that the English language versions of the questions appear in the main body of the report)

A full set of appendices is available on request. This includes:

- A second version of the self-completion exercise (on which the word ordering on the third page differs)
- The version of the discussion guide used in pilot sessions
- The version of the discussion guide used in sessions in which the voting systems were discussed before the proposed question was considered
- The versions of the discussion guides used in depth interviews
- The explanation of the Alternative Vote system used in pilot sessions, which was subsequently refined
- Welsh versions of all research materials

Appendix 1

Self Completion – English Version A

Name _____

Self- completion exercise

Please read and answer the following question and then please think about the questions on the following pages:

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?</p>	
<p>YES</p>	
<p>NO</p>	

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?</p>	
<p>YES</p>	
<p>NO</p>	

1a) Thinking about the question above, which of the following words/phrases would you use to describe this question? Please circle as many words/phrases as you like:

Simple	Confusing	To the point
Direct	Jargon	Complicated
Factual	Biased	Misleading
Neutral	Concise	Clear
Difficult to understand	Easy to understand	Too long

1b) Would you use any other words to describe the question?

N.B. A second version of this page, with the order of the words participants were asked to choose from moved around, was used in some fieldwork..

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?</p>	
YES	
NO	

- 2a) Please circle any words or phrases in the question itself that you would not feel confident to explain to another person.
- 2b) Is there anything else about the question that makes it difficult for you to understand?
- 2c) Please underline any words or phrases in the question itself that you would feel confident to explain to another person.

<p>Referendum on the voting system for parliamentary elections</p> <p>Vote (X) once only</p>	
<p>Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?</p>	
<p>YES</p>	
<p>NO</p>	

3) a) Thinking of any words or phrases you found hard to understand, what do you think that these could be changed to?

b) Is there any information you would you need to help you understand the question better?

Appendix 2

Discussion Guide - Groups

NB – In later fieldwork, participants were shown explanations of the voting systems at section 2. After a brief discussion of elections and voting at section 3, question response took place at section 4, question developments at section 5, and response to alternatives at section 6.

DISCUSSION GUIDE 1823 – EC – Electoral Reform Question Research Groups (1.5 hour)

Notes on Qualitative Questioning:

1. *This guide indicates the areas to be explored in the discussion, the likely order in which topics will be covered and the kinds of questions and techniques that may be used. As it is qualitative research, there will be diversions taken within the dynamics of each interview in order to fully explore respondents' data. (Timings given are for guidance only and will not be strictly adhered to – times spent on each section will be dependent upon the knowledge/interests of each respondent/group – enough time however should be allowed to explore how well the people understand the Question)*
2. *The objectives of the research may be addressed through direct questioning, indirect questioning, observation of non-verbal response in response to stimulus, or analysis of data post hoc. Obviously the levels of literacy and other factors will also need to be taken into account through the types of questioning*

Moderator notes

Overall objective: To test the proposed referendum Question with voters, in order to assess it against the guidelines for assessing question intelligibility and provide possible ways of addressing any issues the Question may raise

To deliver to this, research needs to understand:

1. How the question meets the criteria for assessing Question intelligibility, i.e.

iv) Accessibility to all voters

- easy to understand
- unambiguous
- does not mislead voters in any way
- written in plain language, i.e. language that:
 - uses short sentences (around 15–20 words)
 - is simple, direct, and concise
 - uses familiar words, and avoids jargon or technical terms that would not be easily understood by most people

v) Focused and factual

- to the point
- contains factual information only, describing the Question and the options clearly and accurately
- avoids assuming anything about voters' views

- vi) *Lack of bias*
 - written in neutral language, avoiding words that suggest a judgement or opinion, either explicitly or implicitly
 - ensures that voters don't consider one response more favourably than another
2. **Identify any elements of the referendum Question which may prove problematic for users in the context of these guidelines**
 - Understand the reasons for these issues
 - Explore potential ways in which these issues could be overcome, i.e. alternative wording or phrasing
 3. **Understand of what additional support and information might be required to help potential voters better understand the content of the Question, e.g. explanations of Alternative Vote (AV) and First past the post (FPTP)**
 - Explore any needs with regard to understanding Alternative Vote and First past the post
 - Understand potential ways to explain the different voting systems to voters
 4. **Understand current knowledge around different voting systems in order to fulfil the objectives above**

1. Introductions and Background (5 mins)

Moderator to introduce self and explain the process of market research to respondents (MRS guidelines, confidentiality and recording), and the format of the interview /discussion (some topics for discussion and occasional exercise for them to do)

Permission to record **audio**

Brief respondent 'warm up' questions– select questions as necessary until warmed up:

- First name and age
- Who lives at home?
- What do you do for a living/what occupies your daily life?
- Any hobbies or interests?
- Favourite TV programme? Favourite film? Internet sites?

2. Response to the Question (20-30 mins)

Moderator to take into account individual capabilities, degree of knowledge and understanding

- ***Moderator introduction:** You may or may not know that the government is proposing to hold a referendum (or vote) next Spring to ask the general public about which voting system they would prefer to elect MPs to the House of Commons. The purpose of this session is to look at the proposed Question they will use in the referendum on behalf of the Electoral Commission. This research is not about understanding which voting system you feel is right or wrong rather it is to see what you think about the wording of the Question and to see how well you and other people might understand the question.*
- ***MODERATOR TO HAND OUT SELF COMPLETION HANDOUT.** – We would now like you to work through this handout for a few minutes. Please answer the Question on the first page before moving on to the rest of the worksheet, which asks you about what you understood or did not understand within the question. There are no right or wrong answers to any of the questions. Once you have had a chance to complete the questionnaire you might want to share with others in the group how you responded but you do not have to if you would rather not.*

- Once group has completed the questionnaire...explore responses as follows. It may be useful to show the Question to the group though the discussion

Do you want the United Kingdom to adopt the “alternative vote” system instead of the current “first past the post” system for electing Members of Parliament to the House of Commons?

Yes

No

Answering the Question (page 1)

- How did you find it answering the Question?
- How confident do you feel that you answered it in the way you would want to? What makes you say that?
- If you had been given this Question in a referendum how would you feel?

Accessibility

- What do you think that this Question is trying to say?
- How would you put it in your own words?
- Referring to the self-completion - What words did you circle to describe the question? Why did you choose those? What made it so? Were there any other words you used to describe the Question? Why?
- On a scale of 1-10 (where 1 is difficult and 10 is easy) how easy do you think it is to understand? Why?
- How would you describe the language in this? [Spontaneous then prompt if necessary – e.g. plain, straightforward, confusing, complicated]
- Are there any words or phrases that you were unsure of /are not clear? Which ones? [if FPTP or AV mentioned, moderator to note and then explain that these will be discussed later, note all other words or phrases]
- Is there any ‘jargon’ that you don’t understand?
- Imagine you were given this Question in a polling station, would you want to ask any questions about it? What would ask? What extra information would you need? Would you want that information to be on the ballot paper or somewhere else?

Focussed and factual

- Are there any words that you think are not necessary? Which ones?
- Do you think the Question assumes that you know certain things or have certain views? What do you think they assume?

Lack of bias

- Do you think that the Question is trying to persuade you to answer yes or no or neither in particular?
- What makes you say that?
- Who do you think wrote this Question?

Format and Layout

- What do you think about the way the Question is set out?
- What difference does this make to the way you answer the Question? Does it help or make it more difficult to answer the Question?

3. Response to alternative questions (15-20 mins)

NOTE TO MODERATOR: These are alternative questions. This question has been put in as a comparison to understand if the whole question is understood more clearly or if there are any words, phrases which may work better than the proposed Question.

SHOW FIRST ALTERNATIVE QUESTION AND EXPLAIN: Another way that the question could be phrased could be like this – please say what you think about this one:

First impressions

- What are your first impressions of this question?

Accessibility

- How easy/difficult is it to understand? What makes you say that?

Focussed and factual

- Are there any words that you think are not necessary in this?

Lack of bias

- Do you think that the question is trying to persuade you to answer yes or no or neither in particular?

Comparison

- How does it compare to the first Question?
- Are there any words/phrases that you prefer within this? Why?
- Is there anything about the way it is phrased that you think is better or worse than the original?
- How does the look and layout compare?
- Is it any easier/more difficult to understand – why/not?
- Overall which do you think would be easier to answer? Why?

REPEAT FOR SECOND ALTERNATIVE QUESTION

4. FPTP system (10 mins)

Some of the following information may have emerged from the initial discussion of the Question but at this stage we would want to understand how much the respondents know about the current way we vote. As such the way the questions are phrased in the actual discussion may depend on what has emerged in response to the Question.

MODERATOR TO START;

- Thinking of the Question that is proposed what do you think will happen if more people vote 'no'?
 - What do you think this will mean? [*gain spontaneous thoughts then prompt below*]
 - For the way people will vote in the next general election
 - For how candidates will be elected
 - What other implications might this have? [*gain spontaneous comments re. Impact on political parties and the way governments are formed*]
- Did you vote in the last General Election in May?
- Yes
 - What did you have to do when you voted? What was the process?
 - How did the candidates win/get elected?
 - Were you aware it was called FPTP? [*Assess if they equate what they did in May to FPTP*]

- No (N.B. respondents may have voted in previous general elections or other elections) - Do you know much about the way we vote in a general election at the moment, i.e. FPTP
 - What do you imagine happens when you vote at the moment?
 - How do you think that candidates win?
 - How do you know about this? [explore through which channels they are aware of this]

Moderator - Show description of FPTP system [descriptions will be rotated – visual and non-visual]. Description shown in stages – stage 1 – how you vote, stage 2 – how votes are counted/candidates are chosen. For each description ask:

- Were you aware of this? Is anything new? What did you already know about?
- Do you understand this?
- Are there any words or phrases that you were unsure of /are not clear? Which ones?
- If possible – can you think of any alternatives that would be clearer for you?
- *For visual option:* How helpful is it to have a visual? Why? Anything that you would do to improve the visual?
- *After one description* – if you had to describe FPTP to someone who isn't here what would you say? [respondent to put into own words]

After both descriptions

- Is there anything that you are still not sure about the FPTP system?
- How does this information make you feel about the wording of the Question? And the alternative?
 - Does it make you view it in any way differently? [N.B. focus on whether an explanation has helped people to understand what they are voting for]
 - Do you think that the Question needs to be adapted in any way to reflect this?
 - How confident do you feel about your response to the Question now?
- How much of this information do you think you need before you could answer the Question?
- What would be the best way to tell you about the FPTP system?
- What would you want know?
 - How you vote?
 - How votes are counted?
 - What implications this may have?
- Before you came here, were you aware of any other types of voting system at all? [gain spontaneous response – if AV mentioned suggest that this will be discussed later] (*depending on timing this question may not be asked*)

5. Understanding AV system (10 mins)

The precise nature of this discussion will depend on what has emerged through the course of the previous discussion

- Thinking of the Question that is proposed what do you think will happen if more people vote 'yes'?
 - What do you think this will mean? [*gain spontaneous thoughts then prompt below*]
 - For the way people vote in the next general election
 - For how candidates will be elected
 - What other implications might this have? [*gain spontaneous comments re. Impact on political parties and the way governments are formed*]

- [as appropriate – *depending on the above discussion*] Are you aware of what the AV system is – that is how you vote? how votes are counted?
- Yes – (moderator to split group if spread of awareness)
 - What do you have to do when you vote? What is the process?
 - How do candidates win?
 - How do you know about this?

Moderator - Show description of AV system. Description shown in stages – stage 1 – how you vote, stage 2 – how votes are counted/candidates are chosen. For each description

- Were you aware of this? Which bit is new? What did you already know about?
- Do you understand this?
- Are there any words or phrases that you were unsure of /are not clear? Which ones?
- If possible – can you think of any alternatives that would be clearer for you?
- How helpful is it to have a visual? Why? Anything that you would do to improve the visual?
- *After description* – if you had to describe AV to someone who isn't here what would you say? [respondent to put into own words]

After both descriptions

- Is there anything that you are still not sure about the AV system?
- How does this information make you feel about the wording of the Question? And the alternative?
 - Does it make you view it in any way differently? [*N.B. focus on whether an explanation has helped people to understand what they are voting for*]
 - Do you think that the Question needs to be adapted in any way to reflect this?
 - How confident do you feel about your response to the Question now?
- How much of this information do you think you need before you could answer the Question?
- What would be the best way to tell you about the AV system?
- What would you want know?
 - How you vote?
 - How votes are counted?
 - What implications this may have? [*Do not prompt but people may be interested in the impact a different voting system will have on the political parties and the likelihood of one party being able to form a government (or whether coalition government will become the norm)*].

6. Question developments (5 mins)
--

This section is about understanding spontaneous areas of development and suggestions to improve these. If required to help respondents move on then further suggestions can be made.

- Now that you know about FPTP and AV in more detail and have had a chance to think about the Question some more...
- Do you think any changes are needed to be made to the Question to make it easier for you to understand? [*note any previous discussion of changes required, gain spontaneous suggestions and then prompt as required – for each suggestion please note on post-it*]
 - Words/phrases?
 - Amount of information?
 - Layout?

- Overall structure?
- Any others?
- And are there changes needed to make the Question fairer/less leading?
- Can you think of alternative words or phrases that could be used to make the Question clearer for you? [*moderator to note that descriptions of AV and FPTP will be communicated to the voting public separately but could potentially form part of the preamble to the Question*]
- What about if the Question was set out as follows:
 - This is what happens now, i.e. First past the post. This is what would happen if there was a yes vote. This is what would happen if there was a no vote. Should the UK...etc ?
- What difference would that make? What would be the benefits/drawbacks of putting the Question that way?

Once spontaneous suggestions have been gathered, moderator can discuss the following as required, i.e. if respondents are struggling with these words and struggle to come up with alternatives

- Moderator to show/suggest language alternatives, as required i.e. ‘adopt’
 - What do you think of these alternatives?
 - How useful are these?
 - Do they make it easier to understand? Why/not?
- What about if you had some information about what the referendum is about before the Question?
- What about if you ticked First past the post or Alternative Vote instead of yes or no?

Respondents create their own Question – please ensure time is allowed for this

Respondents, where appropriate, are then invited to create their own version of the question. Moderator to reassure them that this is about clarifying their understanding in light of all the information they have. Respondents to do this in pairs in groups or talk through in depths

Moderator to lay out alternatives words and questions to use as a resource for them to develop the question they feel most appropriate

- Based on what has been discussed today, if you had to write a Question that was easily understood by you and people you know how would you write the Question or adapt the Question that has been discussed today?
- *Once done respondents to talk through their own version and explain why they have chosen what they have*

7. Summing up (5 mins)

- Overall how do you feel about the Question?
- If you had to go back to the Electoral Commission and recommend one thing about the Question what would you say?

Thank and close

Appendix 3

Explanation of First Past the Post – English

NB – Each part of the voting system explanations (F1, F2 etc) appeared on a separate A4 page.

F1

‘First past the post’ system

This system of voting is what is currently used to elect MPs to the House of Commons in a general election in the UK

What does it mean a voter has to do?

Voters are asked to select one candidate and mark their choice with an X

F2

‘First past the post’ system

How does a candidate win?

- The candidate with the most votes in the constituency is elected as the MP

'First past the post' system

F1V

What does it mean a voter has to do?

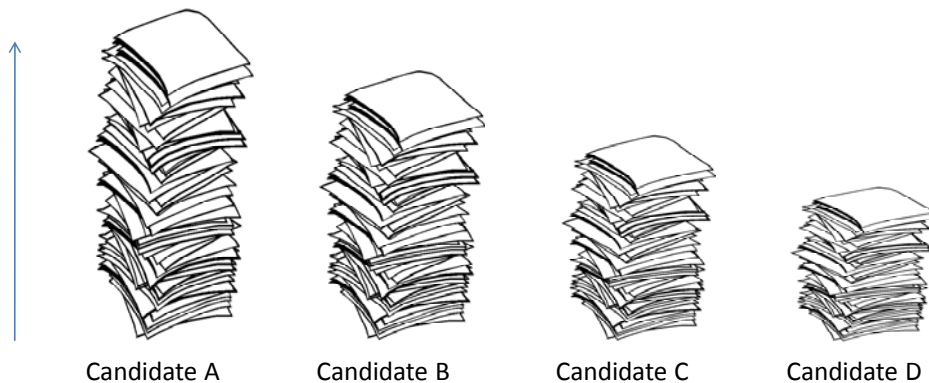
Voters are asked to select one candidate and mark it with an X:

BALLOT PAPER	
Candidate A Party A	
Candidate B Party B	
Candidate C Party C	X
Candidate D Party D	

'First past the post' system

F1V

How does a candidate win?



- The ballot papers are counted and the candidate with the most votes is elected as the MP (candidate A in this example)

Appendix 4

Explanation of Alternative Vote System – English

‘Alternative Vote’ system

This system of voting is *different* to that currently used to elect MPs to the House of Commons.

What does it mean a voter has to do?

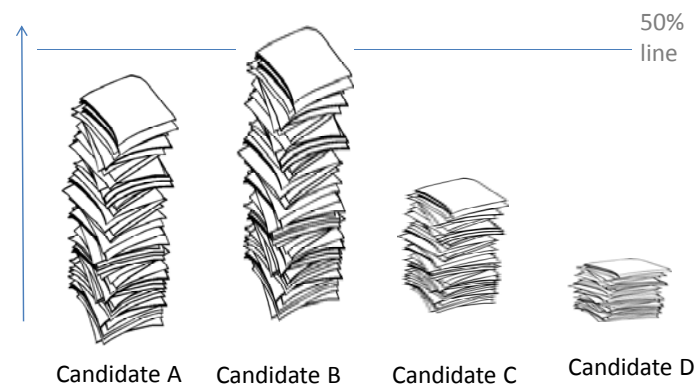
- To vote in this system, the voter puts a ‘1’ by their first choice candidate. If they want to they can put a ‘2’ by their second choice, a ‘3’ by their third choice and so on.
- The voter can vote for as many or as few candidates as they want. So they can just put a 1 on the paper if they want

BALLOT PAPER	
Candidate A Party A	2
Candidate B Party B	4
Candidate C Party C	3
Candidate D Party D	1

‘Alternative Vote’ system

How does this change the way votes are counted and how does a candidate win?

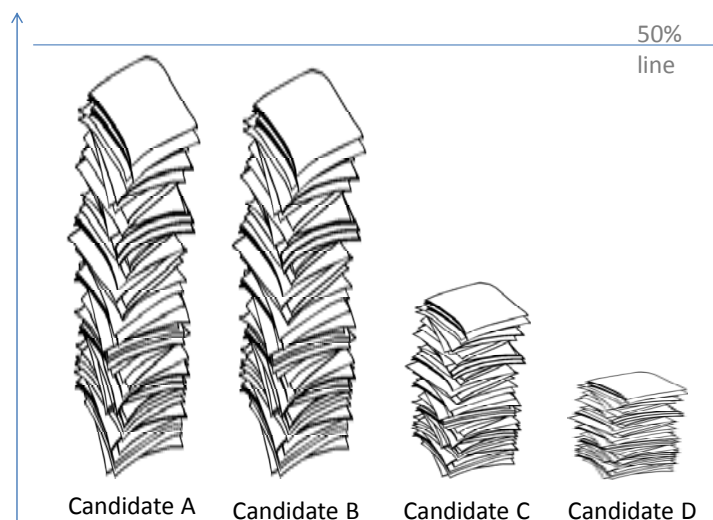
- All the first choice votes are counted and sorted into piles according to first choice.
- A candidate is elected if they get over half (50%) of the first choice votes. That is they need to win more first choice votes than all the other candidates added together. In this example Candidate B would win



- However it may be the case that none of the candidates get over half of the first choice votes – see over

'Alternative Vote' system

- In this example no candidate is the winner as none has over half (50%) of the votes

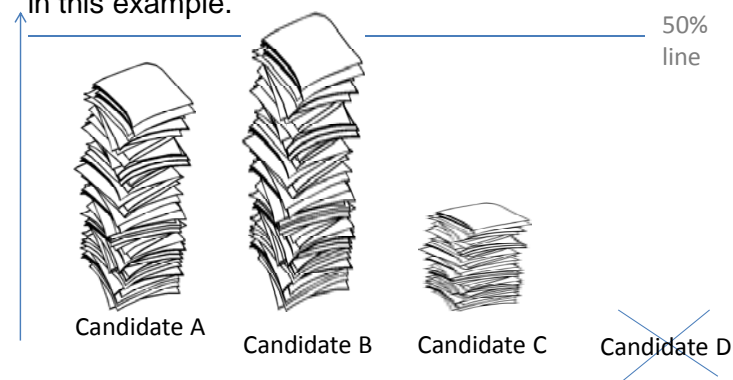


- If none of the candidates gets over half (50%) of the first choice votes then some of the 2nd choices are taken into consideration

'Alternative Vote' system

The way this works is like this:

- The candidate with the least number of first votes is no longer able to win. Their papers are looked at and then the 2nd choice votes on their papers are given to the relevant candidates.
- So in this example Candidate D can no longer win. Candidate D's papers are then looked at and then given to either A, B or C depending on the 2nd choice marked on that paper. So if someone put D as first choice and then B as second it would be added to B's pile.
- This process is repeated until someone has over half the votes. This candidate is elected as the MP. It is B in this example.



Appendix 5 - Alternative Questions – Welsh

Version using abbreviations

Two sentences (version 1)

<p>Refferendwm ar y system bleidleisio ar gyfer etholiadau seneddol</p> <p>Pleidleisiwch (X) unwaith yn unig</p>	
<p>Ar hyn o bryd, mae'r Deyrnas Unedig yn defnyddio dull "y cyntaf i'r felin" i ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ'r Cyffredin. A ddylid defnyddio'r dull "pleidlais amgen" yn lle hwn?</p>	
DYLID	
NA DDYLID	

Two sentences (version 2)

<p>Refferendwm ar y system bleidleisio ar gyfer etholiadau seneddol</p> <p>Pleidleisiwch (X) unwaith yn unig</p>	
<p>Ar hyn o bryd, mae'r Deyrnas Unedig yn defnyddio system o'r enw "y cyntaf i'r felin" i ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ'r Cyffredin. A ddylid defnyddio system o'r enw "pleidlais amgen" yn lle hon?</p>	
DYLID	
NA DDYLID	

More detailed version

**Refferendwm ar y system bleidleisio
ar gyfer etholiadau seneddol**

System ‘y cyntaf i’r felin’

‘Y cyntaf i’r felin’ yw’r system a ddefnyddir ar hyn o bryd i ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ’r Cyffredin.

Yn y system hon, mae pob pleidleisiwr yn nodi X ar y papur pleidleisio wrth ymyl yr ymgeisydd mae’n dymuno ei ethol.

Mae’r holl bleidleisiau’n cael eu cyfrif ac mae’r ymgeisydd â nifer mwyaf y pleidleisiau’n cael ei ethol.

System ‘pleidlais amgen’

Mae system ‘pleidlais amgen’ yn wahanol i’r system a ddefnyddir ar hyn o bryd i ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ’r Cyffredin.

Yn y system hon, mae’r holl bleidleiswyr yn rhifo’r ymgeiswyr ar y papur pleidleisio yn nhrefn eu dewis. Mae’r pleidleisiwr yn rhoi ‘1’ wrth ymyl ei ddewis cyntaf o ymgeisydd, a ‘2’ wrth ymyl ei ail ddewis o ymgeisydd, ac yn y blaen.

Mae’r holl bleidleisiau dewis cyntaf yn cael eu cyfrif. Os bydd gan un ymgeisydd fwy na hanner y pleidleisiau, bydd yn cael ei ethol. Os nad oes mwy na hanner y pleidleisiau gan yr un ymgeisydd, bydd yr ymgeisydd â nifer lleiaf y pleidleisiau’n cael ei ddileu o’r cyfrif. Mae pleidleisiau ail ddewis y bobl a bleidleisiodd dros yr ymgeisydd a ddilëwyd yn cael eu hailddosbarthu wedyn i weddill yr ymgeiswyr. Mae’r broses hon yn cael ei hailadrodd nes bod mwy na hanner y pleidleisiau gan un ymgeisydd, a fydd yn cael ei ethol.

Cwestiwn

Ydych chi am i’r Deyrnas Unedig ddilyn y system “pleidlais amgen” yn lle system gyfredol “y cyntaf i’r felin” ar gyfer ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ’r Cyffredin?

Pleidleisiwch (X) unwaith yn unig

YDW

NAC YDW

Mark against first past the post or alternative vote

<p>Refferendwm ar y system bleidleisio ar gyfer etholiadau seneddol</p> <p>Pleidleisiwch (X) unwaith yn unig</p>	
<p>Pa system bleidleisio ydych chi am i'r Deyrnas Unedig ei defnyddio ar gyfer ethol Aelodau Seneddol i Dŷ'r Cyffredin?</p>	
<p>'Pleidlais amgen' Dyma system wahanol i'r system a ddefnyddir ar hyn o bryd.</p>	
<p>'Y cyntaf i'r felin' Dyma'r system a ddefnyddir ar hyn o bryd.</p>	

Abbreviated version

<p>Refferendwm ar y system bleidleisio ar gyfer etholiadau seneddol</p> <p>Pleidleisiwch (X) unwaith yn unig</p>	
<p>Ydych chi am i'r DU y system "pleidlais amgen" yn lle'r system gyfredol "y cyntaf i'r felin" ar gyfer ethol ASau i Dŷ'r Cyffredin?</p>	
<p>YDW</p>	
<p>NAC YDW</p>	