

Electoral Commission: Individual Electoral Registration

Wave one fieldwork findings report

February 2013

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1. Introduction

1.1. Executive Summary

Ipsos MORI has been commissioned by the Electoral Commission to conduct qualitative research into the wording and design of new paper electoral registration forms.

Great Britain currently operates a dual system of electoral registration: the majority of people are added to the register between August and November each year (the 'annual canvass'), when a form is sent to every household; at other times of the year, individuals can register themselves by filling in a separate form.

This research is to test the paper forms and materials to be used for Individual Electoral Registration (IER) where every individual will be required to register themselves using a single form. The annual canvass activity will continue to ensure that the register is kept accurate and to identify those who need to be removed or invited to register.

The research is composed of two elements: the first wave examines the content of the future forms, and the second is concerned with the design of the new forms. This report is a summary of fieldwork from the first element, which tested the words used in the Household Enquiry Form (HEF) and Individual Electoral Registration Form, as well as the guidance notes that come with each form.

Ipsos MORI interviewed a total of 55 individuals for the first wave of research, with a recruitment mix of 30 on-street rolling recruited depths. There were also 20 pre-recruited in-home interviews with more vulnerable participants who may have difficulties filling in forms. An additional 5 network interviews were held with relevant organisations. Interviews were conducted across England, Scotland and Wales.

The specific objectives of the research were to:

- ◆ Check whether the ordering and 'flow' of the forms is logical and easy to follow;
- ◆ Observe whether people provide the correct information/answers in response to the questions;
- ◆ See if there are any barriers to completing the form – either difficulties in understanding or answering the form, or whether anything discourages people from registering;
- ◆ Probe on whether any additional information was required to help or support people in filling out the forms.

The findings from this research were relatively consistent across the different sub-groups interviewed. This means that most participants understood what the forms were asking for and the language they used, but with some exceptions and common

areas of misunderstanding. As a result of this consistency there are some clear suggestions for the next design stage, grounded in the research.

The top-level findings from wave one of the research are as follows:

- ◆ **Both forms are generally understood** – and participants did not have many serious issues with filling out the forms, or the order of the questions on the forms. More vulnerable participants, however, were more likely to be hesitant to fill them out.
- ◆ **Many participants were confused by the wording around the nationality and related eligibility criteria**, although the majority of participants were British and would not need to read this part, the wording used often caused participants to stop and think about what it meant, questioning what their answer should be.
- ◆ There is low awareness and **confusion about the proposed function and purpose of the HEF and IER forms**, and how people will be registered to vote. Many participants believed that as a result of completing the HEF they were placed on the Electoral Register.
- ◆ There are some issues around the **choice of words in the Welsh language version** of the forms.
- ◆ There were also some **specific content issues** that raised some concerns – e.g. the definition of ‘resident’: the IER form requirement that respondents provide their previous address details if they have moved home in the past year; the words used around identity checking and the **opt-in for the edited register**– these are noted throughout the report.

This report also makes a number of recommendations for ensuring that the forms will be understood by as many people as possible. These are detailed in the recommendations section of this report (section 3).

The topline recommendations for both forms are to:

- ◆ Clarify some of the language used around nationality and eligibility requirements, to ensure that it is well understood and the tone used does not put people off;
- ◆ Provide greater information about the purpose of the forms, which will help and encourage people to fill them out;
- ◆ Put more of the information currently in the guidance notes into the body of the form where it has been identified that this would be useful;
- ◆ Resolve some Welsh language-specific issues in relation to the more technical terms employed; and
- ◆ Consider whether it is possible to acknowledge receipt of the forms – particularly for the IER form.

Specific recommendations for the HEF are to:

- ◆ Unify the language used in describing attainers; and on a related note
- ◆ Ensure that the ‘Residents’ details’ part of the form is simple to fill out and is able to hold as many names as necessary.

Specific recommendations for the IER form are to:

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This work was carried out in accordance with the requirements of the international quality standard for Market Research, ISO 20252:2006.

- ◆ Reassure people over the new, higher, level of information required – for example, the level of address information and provision of a National Insurance Number;
- ◆ Provide some clarification on the nationality section for British and foreign citizens
- ◆ Reconsider some of the wording in the immigration status section as it is seen as too intimidating;
- ◆ Give greater differentiation to address questions (current, previous and second home) to help people fill them out accurately;
- ◆ Provide more information around voting by post or proxy; and
- ◆ Explain the differences between the full and edited electoral register more clearly to assist decision making.

1.2. Methodology

This wave of the research was designed with the specific aim of testing the public's understanding of the *content* of the forms, and purposely did not seek feedback on the *design* of the forms.

Ipsos MORI conducted 55 interviews spread across England, Scotland and Wales. The interviews were divided between days of rolling depth interviews recruited on-street with members of the general public, pre-recruited depth interviews with harder to reach and vulnerable members of society, and network interviews with specific interest groups such as those that represent service voters and black and minority ethnic (BME) voters.

The interviews were split as follows:

Table 1 - Wave one interview quota

	England	Scotland	Wales	Network	Total
Rolling depths	10	10	10		30
Pre-recruited depths	10	5	5	5	24
					55

Rolling depth interviews were held in central London, Edinburgh, and Swansea with members of the general public. **Pre-recruited interviews** were designed to be held with more hard to reach and vulnerable members of society and took place in east London and rural areas around Nottingham in England; deprived areas outside Edinburgh and Glasgow in Scotland; and Bangor, Caernarfon and Anglesey in Wales.

The rolling depth interviews were recruited according to a centralised quota, which ensured that interviews were conducted with a variety of people including:

- ◆ An even mix of men and women
- ◆ People who are usually responsible for filling out forms in their household, as well as those who are not
- ◆ First time voters, students and attainers
- ◆ A good spread of ages, including over 75 year olds
- ◆ An even spread of social grade
- ◆ Those with English as an additional language and BME participants
- ◆ Respondents who are ineligible to be on the Electoral Register

Pre-recruited interviews were held with members of the public who may be more likely to encounter difficulties completing the forms. Some interviews were specifically set up to test the Welsh language forms with Welsh speakers. The specific groups targeted were:

- ◆ People with lower literacy skills
- ◆ People with learning difficulties
- ◆ People who have visual impairments
- ◆ People who have physical disabilities, particularly those who may find form-filling more difficult
- ◆ Welsh speakers (conducted with Welsh materials)

The network interviews were held with representatives from a number of organisations in contact with specific interest groups. The materials were sent ahead of time to allow these representatives to get a view from multiple members of their organisations.

Alongside the interview research, Ipsos MORI has worked in partnership with Dr Rob Waller, an expert in usability based at the Simplification Centre. Dr Waller fed into the research at all stages, and his feedback on the forms has been incorporated into this report.

1.3. Interpreting qualitative data

Unlike quantitative surveys, qualitative research is designed to be illustrative, detailed and exploratory, providing insight into the perceptions, feelings and intended behaviours of people rather than conclusions from a quantifiable valid sample. Therefore, these interviews do not allow statistical conclusions to be drawn about the extent to which views are held across the wider public.

Throughout this report, verbatim comments from participants are used. Where this is the case, it is important to remember that the views expressed do not always represent the views of other participants, but are illustrative of the issues raised in that interview.

The perceptions of participants make up a considerable proportion of the evidence in this report, and it is important to remember that although such perceptions may not always be factually accurate, they represent the truth to those who relate them.

Materials

The materials used in all interviews (the discussion guide as well as the forms tested) can be found in the appendices of this report.

2. Key findings

2.1. Household Enquiry Form

The Household Enquiry Form (HEF) gathers basic information on the people living in a household (age and eligibility) in preparation for the Individual Electoral Registration form, which is sent to each of the individuals listed on the HEF. One HEF is sent to each household and is filled in by one person resident there. The form used for this stage of content testing is available at appendix 3.

2.1.1. Overall impressions:

The general view was that that this was a very easy form to fill out, and participants did not have difficulties with providing the information requested. The 'household' model of information gathering was generally accepted, even by those living in shared accommodation, which may stem from the current way in which electoral registration is completed, though a few participants did say they may ask others' permission to give their details.

Many participants believed that as a result of completing and returning the HEF they would be registered to vote. It was not clear to them that this was just an "enquiry" form and that a subsequent registration form would be sent. Indeed, many expected some sort of acknowledgement that their form had been received.

2.1.2. Specific findings:

Age

The **inconsistency of how attainers are labelled** on page two of the form caused some confusion for participants. At the top of the form participants are asked to provide the details of all people aged 17 and over in the household; yet by each name slot (questions 1-4) the subsequent tick box asks if the person is under 18. This led a few participants to name their significantly younger children.

Several participants also questioned why there was an "over 70" tick box, as there was no explanation anywhere on the form about why this information was needed, and there was no clear link for participants between being aged over 70 and registering to vote.

Additionally, some who fell between 18 and 70 asked why there was not a box for them to tick as well.

Nationality and eligibility

One issue that arose for many participants revolved around the perceived complicated **eligibility criteria for voting registration** and the wording on this section in the form. Particularly, though not exclusively, among more vulnerable groups such as those with low literacy skills, knowledge of the EU or Commonwealth is low. Although those who raised this as an issue were all British, the form did not explain itself well enough for them to understand that they did not need to read this section. Terms such as ‘non-EU Commonwealth citizen’ were considered complicated, with many questioning what this meant – some even projected their concern onto others (see verbatims below).

“Does the average person know what “non-EU citizens” means?” – Swansea

Specific words

The word “**resident**” caused some confusion for a number of participants, who wanted clarification of how it was defined. This was a particular problem at the address section. The need for further explanation was due to some participants being unsure whether they should count themselves as resident at other properties where they spend some time (for example at their parents’ home) or whether a partner may be resident because they spend a few nights a week there.

There was also some confusion over some other terms used in the form – in discussion with participants with learning difficulties, the terms ‘**either**’, ‘**proxy**’ and ‘**declaration**’ were thought to be particularly difficult words for some people to understand.

Other barriers

There was a mixed response to letters or forms addressed to ‘**the householder/occupant**’. Any letter or form will need to distinguish itself from estate agent letters and the like which are addressed in a similar way and often disregarded without being opened. This appeared to be more of an issue for more vulnerable participants.

Generally, participants were relaxed about sending the information required by the form to their Local Authority by post. This seemed to be in part because this is how voter registration is currently conducted and therefore the process was familiar to many. However, one vulnerable participant said that they wouldn’t fill out the HEF form because of **concerns about data privacy** – this participant had a bad experience with debt collectors finding out their new address, and held the electoral registration form they had filled out to blame.

While it was generally seen as a very positive thing that a helpline number is provided, participants were keen on increasing the number of ways it is possible to **contact the council** about registration. Suggestions included providing an 0800 telephone line, and specialised communication channels for those with disabilities.

This fitted with the prevailing view that this form was much like an application to other government departments or companies – one participant noted that “*British Gas has a disability team who are friendlier and understand your issues*”, and recommended that electoral registration follow the same path.

Indeed, this was also highlighted in a network interview, where the interviewee would have liked to see more options for contacting the council provided – for example an email address. They also suggested that a more “explicit” invitation to call for help is necessary as those who need help may need more encouragement. For example, it could say “If you need help with understanding the form...”

Guidance notes:

Due to the ease with which participants tended to complete the form, very few participants read the guidance notes of their own volition, and none felt the need to refer to the notes whilst filling out the form. At this stage, a lack of form design features which would alert participants to the guidance notes may be a factor, but as a separate piece of paper the notes were often disregarded. When prompted to read the notes, participants found they did not provide a more understandable explanation of the effect of nationality on eligibility to vote – the one area where clarification was often needed.

In one network interview it was also suggested that greater definition be provided to the phrase ‘short term visitors’ to enable form fillers to accurately decide who to include or not include in the form.

2.1.3. Other findings (including network interviews):

Participants in some of the network interviews noted that the form had little in the way of introduction. A clearer introduction, with a more detailed explanation of the electoral registration process, should help make it clear what the purpose of the HEF is and that participants are not registered just by completing this form.

Indeed, something that was suggested both by some members of the public and the network representatives, was to add a “next steps” section at the end of the form. This would remind participants to send off the form, as well as re-iterate that each person named on the HEF will receive an individual registration form.

In another network interview it was suggested that the importance of registering all people on the form should be stressed to avoid people selectively registering some people and not others.

It was noted in the expert review that there is a lack of clarity around liability for the offence of providing false or incomplete information on the HEF. In households where the household members are not related the person who fills in the form may be

acting on false information provided by another member, but the wording implies that they, and not the person providing them with false information, are still liable.

2.2. Individual Electoral Registration form

The Individual Electoral Registration (IER) form is the form which members of the public will use to apply to enter their names on the electoral roll. The form is addressed to individuals and filled out by every individual listed on the HEF as resident at an address. The form which was used for content testing in this wave is available at appendix 4.

2.2.1. Overall impressions:

As with the HEF, many participants found the IER form easy to fill out – although it was more difficult than the HEF, and more vulnerable participants were disproportionately less able to deal with this form compared with the HEF.

Few people had difficulties with the order and flow of the questions in the form, but a minority did suggest putting the address section earlier in the form, following name and date of birth. This was felt to be the order of most forms.

Participants were generally comfortable with providing the level and type of information the form asked for, although fewer were comfortable with sending this information out in the post.

Linked to this, participants generally expected some sort of response after submitting this form, feeling that the enhanced level of disclosure required made it more important to know that their details had arrived safely. One remarked that they got a text message from their dentist after they booked an appointment and felt that electoral registration could be dealt with the same way. A number of participants were supportive of telephone or online registration.¹

2.2.2. Specific findings:

Nationality and eligibility

The principal finding from the research into the IER form appears to be around the **voting eligibility criteria and the nationality section**. Knowledge of the countries in the Commonwealth and EU is low, particularly amongst more vulnerable groups, and although it can probably be assumed that people to whom this question applies will know who they are, many of the participants who are British citizens were confused when presented with the eligibility criteria. One British participant skipped over the entire section as they felt it did not apply to them.

¹ This research only looked at paper forms, although the Government has stated its intention to make provision for people to register online and possibly by other channels, .e.g by telephone. (Paragraph 21, Command Paper Cm8108 [<http://www.cabinetoffice.gov.uk/sites/default/files/resources/individual-electoral-reform.pdf>]})

Another issue, which was particularly problematic for immigrant and ethnic minority groups, revolved around question 5a (Immigration status, for non-EU Commonwealth citizens). The introduction of **questions on immigration status** raised fears for some that this form was being used for other purposes related to immigration control. One person with a visual impairment felt that the wording was ‘too authoritative’ and would put people off filling it out.

“It smacks of a legality check” – Network interview

The phrase *“We will need to ask you for proof of your immigration status. We will write to you about this”* at the end of the nationality question made some participants uneasy, and drew comments about ‘big brother’ style government. Most participants who made this comment were people who would be required to fill the section out, although a number of British participants who read this section raised it too. Similar comments were also made at the end of the National Insurance number and nationality questions.

Finally, terms such as ‘**leave to remain**’ and ‘**leave to enter**’, whilst accurate, are somewhat archaic and reduced understanding of the question overall.

Personal details

Acceptance of the need to provide a **National Insurance Number (NINO)** was high amongst those interviewed. Some questioned why it was being asked for, and this response came mostly from non-UK citizens; however, most participants were happy to provide the number often because they were used to giving it on a number of other forms.

On the whole people understood that the NINO would be used for identification purposes.

“If you speak to the government [your NINO] is your reference number” - Nottingham.

All participants either knew their NINO off by heart or knew where to find it – even retirees, and the guidance alongside that question on the form on how to find it was deemed useful for those that were not entirely sure.

Addresses

The address section of the form is made up of several parts: current address, any other current addresses, previous addresses from the last 12 months and a section allowing for people to explain why they should be registered at more than address.

Opinions were split on the question around **previous and second addresses** (see wording below). While some were comfortable with providing this information, others questioned why the form was asking for past addresses. A student interviewed in Wales understood that the form allowed them to be registered in two locations at one time, and others made the connection to second homes.

Address sections

Q6) Home address where you are currently resident

Q7) Any other address(es) where you are currently resident

Q8) Any address(es) where you have stopped being resident in the last twelve months

If you were registered to vote at another address, your name will be taken off the register for that address. However, if you believe you should still also be registered there, please tell us why.

Although this issue is likely to be dealt with at the design stage, the lack of differentiation between the questions asking for second and previous home details often led to incorrect completion of the form, with some respondents providing their previous two addresses over a longer period of time.

On a related note, there was some confusion about the word 'resident' with many participants asking for a clearer definition of what this meant. For example, a participant who had recently moved out of their parents home but still often visited it was not sure whether to put this address or not.

The phrase '**stopped being resident**' also caused some participants to stop and think about what this means, recommending a simpler form of words such as "any other addresses that you have lived at in the last year".

Although this was due in part to the undesigned nature of the forms, a number of participants misread the **questions on housing history and second homes**. Some respondents who skimmed the questions treated this section like other types of application form and filled out a longer version of their housing history, rather than providing any addresses where they are also resident and any previous addresses as the questions require.

Other issues

Some of the terms used in the **Welsh language version** of the forms were not understood by some of the Welsh participants.

- ◆ No participants understood the term *Cenedligrwydd* (which is how 'nationality' is translated throughout both forms), often translating it as 'ethnicity' or 'religion'.

- ◆ Similarly, *deuddeng*, used at question two to mean ‘12 months’, was commonly mistranslated as ‘two years’. Using *blwyddn* (year) instead was recommended by some participants.
- ◆ Participants asked for clarification and explanation throughout question five (nationality) – in particular over Welsh versions of terms such as ‘EU’ and ‘Commonwealth’.

More generally, Welsh speakers noted that the language used was quite academic and unfamiliar to speakers of common Welsh. People using the Welsh language forms would require either a dictionary or the English version to be certain they had answered the form correctly.

Whilst younger participants were more familiar with the terms employed owing to changes in the teaching of Welsh at school, older participants who learned colloquial Welsh said that they would either fill out the English versions of the forms or use them as a guide to fill out the Welsh – for example one older participant was a Welsh speaker but unable to read written Welsh. However even younger, well-educated Welsh speakers stumbled over *cednligrwydd*.

Participants noted that as the form required a higher level of detail than the HEF, it was more important to receive an **acknowledgement** that their data had been received safely.

There was also confusion about what happened after this form had been completed and returned – participants assumed that they would be registered to vote, but this may be partly due to information participants had gathered from the administration of the interview – specifically that the interviewer had generally told them at this point that the HEF did not register them to vote and that the next form would.

Some participants felt that the question on **voting by post or proxy** implied that they had to choose one of the two options and was ignoring the option of voting at the polling booth. It was felt that this option should be explained, and only then offer people an alternative of voting by post or proxy. One participant asked “*what do I do if I want to vote in person?*”

The proviso about the Council’s **legal requirement to provide personal data** made participants uneasy in some instances as they worried about not being able to control who can see their information. Additionally, the emphasis in the section on the edited register on the fact that the data could be used for commercial purposes eroded trust in the process as a whole for one participant.

Guidance notes:

As with the HEF, few participants looked through the attached guidance without prompting from the interviewer. One participant felt that the section on data

protection was sufficiently important that it should be put on the main form. The guidance notes did little to reassure those confused about the nationality and voting eligibility checks in question five.

2.2.3. Other findings (including network interviews):

In one network interview the **level of detail** the form requested was described as 'intimidating'. It was felt that those 'on the bread line' might see the questions, particularly those relating to immigration status, as a test to see if they are doing things correctly, and be put off filling in the form. It was also suggested that participants should be given a choice of identification to provide, instead of their NINO – possibly a passport number.

One interview with a participant who was **resident in a homeless shelter** raised an interesting point. Under the terms of their accommodation at the centre they had been registered on the electoral roll, although the participant said that they had only ever voted once. The participant thought that individual registration was a good idea, but it was unclear how they would be able to register without a home address.

The **expert review** by Rob Waller also highlighted some areas for possible improvement:

- ◆ Question nine on the **edited electoral register** has the potential to cause some confusion with a double negative in the question. He also recommended that the second paragraph explaining the full register come before the first paragraph, as people are being asked to tick a box prior to reading all the information about the different registers.
- ◆ Raising the prospect of being on a register for general sale might also put off those who had issues with keeping their data private - a factor which also arose at the declaration.

3. Recommendations

A number of recommendations have emerged from the fieldwork and through an expert review conducted by Dr Rob Waller, a simplification expert.

3.1. Recommendations for both forms

Clarify language around nationality and eligibility to vote

A key recommendation for stage two is to simplify the information provided around who is eligible to vote for which elections in both forms and in the notes. Although the majority of people filling out the form are British and will not necessarily need to fully understand the information to be able to register to vote this can lead to incorrect completion of the form.

Some specific suggestions from the expert review are listed below:

- ◆ The section heading in both forms could be re-titled as ‘Who can vote?’
- ◆ The list could be put in a bullet point list with the first point simply listing ‘British citizen’, rather than saying British, Irish and EU. Giving this its own line will help route British people away from the rest of the question which is not relevant to them.
- ◆ A visual representation of voting eligibility by citizenship may be easier to understand for more people than the current verbal one. A draft is below:

	UK Parliament	UK local	Scottish Parliament, if resident there	Welsh Assembly, if resident there
British	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Irish	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Other EU states	X	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
Commonwealth*, including Malta and Cyprus	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>

- The chief problem with this idea is that most people are eligible to vote in most elections (so it may be worthwhile adding in a row for ‘other foreign citizens’). Directing British citizens away from the nationality/eligibility criteria altogether as mentioned in the previous bullet point may be a simpler approach in the form – although a matrix such as the above may work well in attached notes.

Provide greater information about the purpose of the forms

Participants frequently scanned the forms rather than reading them in depth, and few understood the specific purpose of each form or how they related to each other. The introductions to each form could contain more information to explain what the forms are asking for and why, and what each form does and doesn't do.

HEF

- ◆ The introduction to this form does not explicitly state that it is not a voting registration form. This information should be prominent, alongside the fact that this form is the first step in the registration process and needs to be filled out, and the requirement that all people resident at the address need to be put on the form.
- ◆ Another recommendation is for a 'next steps' section, along the lines of the instructions at the start of the form, outlining what people can expect after submitting the form (an IER form addressed to individual household members to complete the registration process).

IER

- ◆ This form should state outright at the beginning that it is the electoral registration form and that it needs to be filled out for the person to be registered to vote.
- ◆ To avoid putting people off it might help to provide a brief explanation of why the specific pieces of information requested are required; for example the national Insurance number question could say "this will be used to check your identity"

Put more necessary information in the notes into the body of the form

In the expert review by Dr Waller, it was also suggested that as much necessary information as possible be on the form itself as people rarely refer to guidance notes, and in the research it was noted that very few people read the attached notes sheet without prompting.

An exception would be around the nationality and eligibility criteria, where extended information on nationality and eligibility criteria could be put into attached notes if it was made sufficiently clear that the majority of people (British citizens) did not need them.

One area in need of more in-form explanation is questions six to eight (the questions on current, previous and second addresses) in the IER form. More clarification – not only on how to fill out the questions but on why the information is needed – would answer a number of queries raised in our research.

Resolve Welsh-specific issues

Whilst the forms compared favourably to other Welsh language forms participants had encountered (for example benefits and census forms), a number of academic terms in the forms still confused many:

- ◆ The term *cenedligrwydd* needs to be replaced or explained as none of our participants were able to translate it accurately.
- ◆ Another word which needs to be considered for replacement is *deuddeng*. The more technical terms, especially those relating to nationality and government, could be better explained as participants were asking for clarification throughout question five.

The feeling was that much of this confusion arose because the forms were direct transliterations of the English forms rather than translations which took into account the different nuances of Welsh language and syntax.

As it stands the Welsh language version is too academic and modern for many older Welsh speakers, who speak a more colloquial form of Welsh, to understand without deep thought or referring to the English version. Sending out the forms bilingually so that Welsh speakers can refer to the English version if they get stuck is another option².

Consider acknowledgements of receipt

A common factor brought up in interviews was that people expected an acknowledgement that their data had been received. This was particularly the case with the IER form as participants felt that as they were sending a higher level of personal information in the post, councils should be more obliged to send an acknowledgement. This is an issue for local councils rather than the Electoral Commission directly but it could be a consideration for best practice guidelines.

3.2. HEF-specific recommendations

Clarify language around attainers

The use of differing language in the same question around registering attainers caused confusion and should be unified so that there is no misunderstanding around who can register to vote.

- ◆ One suggestion from the expert review could be that the question introduction explains what it is the question is looking for. A draft first sentence to add to the top of page two is "*People cannot vote until they are 18, but we need to know about anyone 17 or older, so we can add them to the electoral register in good time*". This way the current tick boxes can remain as the under 18/17 or over contradiction is removed.

² For the purposes of this research, Welsh-speaking participants were given Welsh-only forms, with the English versions available for reference if needed. This was so that these interviews focused specifically on the Welsh language. However, in practice such forms would be issued as bilingual documents so that voters would be able to refer to either the Welsh or English wording.

Residents' details section

The section asking for details of all people resident at an address often drew two comments – that it was too complicated and that there should be more room for people with larger families. In his expert review, Rob Waller has suggested that both issues can be dealt with by setting this question out as a table. This will help people with filling it out but is also more space efficient for people with larger families:

First name (s)	Surname	Over 17?	Over 70?

3.3. IER form-specific recommendations

Reassure people about the level of information required

Whilst most participants were comfortable with the level of information required, being asked to provide a higher level of personal information around address and other personal attributes in a considerably longer form was a particular concern for more vulnerable participants, who we know are also less likely to register to vote under the current system. We recommend that the level of information that the form asks for should be the least detailed as possible for the registration process, particularly around previous addresses, National Insurance numbers and immigration status. It would also reassure people to know exactly why the information being asked for is needed.

Clarify 'nationality' section

British participants were often confused by the 'nationality' section. Therefore it would serve the majority of those completing the form to make clearer that British people need only answer the question asking for their nationality and that the other questions (relating to immigration) are not relevant to them.

Reconsider some of the 'immigration' terminology

The language used around immigration in the form was seen as quite authoritative, particularly amongst interviews with more vulnerable members of society, but also by others. Couching the question in less stark language, or explaining why this information is required, might help to sever the negative connotations tied to this question. There was a similar reaction to some of the phrases about nationality and National Insurance number. Making the language more neutral would help to encourage people to complete the forms fully.

Differentiate home address questions

When designing the form it would be useful to make a clear differentiation between question seven, which asks for any other addresses where a person is resident and question eight, which asks for previous addresses in the past 12 months. Without a clear distinction it was found that some participants began to provide a more detailed past housing history. The phrase ‘stopped being resident’ confused some participants too and could be reconsidered.

Change the ‘voting by post or proxy’ question

As the majority of people registering to vote are likely to vote in person, it was felt that the form currently gives this question too much prominence, to the extent that some felt that it implied that people need to apply for one or either.

In his expert review, Rob Waller has suggested an alternative form for the question:

If you cannot get to the Polling Station

There are two options that allow you to vote even if you are away on the day of the election, or if you cannot get to the polling station.

Tick a box if you would like an application form to:

- Vote by post*
- Vote by proxy (this means that you appoint someone to vote on your behalf)*

Explain the difference between the full and edited register more clearly

Few participants were aware that there are two registers, and many were also unaware that one was for general sale. The double negative question by itself (i.e. asking people to actively ‘tick’ a box to opt out of something) is also confusing for participants. We would recommend that both are better explained, and that the full register should be introduced before asking about consent to be put on the edited register – at present it is the other way around.

Our recommendation comes from Rob Waller’s expert review. His recommendation contextualises the question, which should address the issues raised in the research:

Opting into the Edited Register

There are two versions of the Electoral Register:

The Full Electoral Register

Everyone’s name will be on this. It is used for

- *elections and referendums*
- *preventing and detecting crime*
- *checking applications for credit*

The Edited Register

This version is optional. It is sold to companies who use it to contact you for marketing and similar purposes.

[] *Tick if you want to be in the Edited Register*

Appendices

Appendix 1: Discussion Guide

(Used for all depth interviews except network interviews)

12-066848-01 Electoral Commission IER form testing Topic guide FINAL

Key Themes	Specific Question Areas	Timings (approximate)
General introductions	<p>Introduce self, Ipsos MORI</p> <p>Thank participants for agreeing to be interviewed; mention should take a maximum of c 30 minutes and confirm incentive amount.</p> <p>Introduce today’s topic</p> <p>“This research is commissioned by the Electoral Commission, the independent body set up by the UK Parliament that monitors and sets standards for well-run elections. The research is looking into the wording of some forms and whether they are easy to use and understand. We are not looking to focus on the design of the forms.</p> <p>Anonymity of respondents, confidentiality of responses and compliance with MRS (Market Research Society) code of conduct.</p> <p>Reassure that we are not looking to see if they ‘do it correctly’; our interest is in whether they think the forms make sense.</p> <p>Request permission to record conversation for help with note taking; recording will be destroyed at the end of the project.</p>	2 mins
Completing the forms	<p>Participants will be given the forms and materials and explained that they are to imagine these have arrived at their home in the post. They will then be asked to complete the forms. Please make participants aware that this is a simplified, draft version, and we just want to know what they think of the content – this is not what the forms would actually look like. During this time the participant is encouraged to “think aloud” and the researcher will take any observational notes.</p> <p>INTRO FOR HEF FORM: Imagine you have just moved house and this form has arrived in the post from your local council. It is addressed to ‘the occupant’.</p>	5 mins (split between first form and second form)

Key Themes	Specific Question Areas	Timings (approximate)
<p><u>HEF FORM</u></p> <p>Understanding the purpose of the forms and general ease of understanding</p>	<p>What would you think if you got this sent to you?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> -First impressions; read or throw away? - Why would you get this? What were you being asked to do? <p>How easy or difficult did you find completing these forms? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there anything you didn't understand or was not clear? - Any words or phrases that you didn't understand or thought didn't make sense? - Probe for reasons why <p>Did you feel that what you were being asked to do was made clear?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was clear/unclear? <p>Did you read everything fully, scan it, or did you skip any of it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you scan/skip that aspect? <p>Was there anything you were asked to provide you felt uncomfortable about? Not sure why you were asked for it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PROBE ON: - HOW PARTICIPANTS FELT ABOUT GIVING INFORMATION ABOUT OTHER HOUSEHOLD MEMBERS <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - "AGED UNDER 18" AND "AGED OVER 70" - NOTE TO MODERATOR: CHECK WITH PARTICIPANT IF IN FACT EVERYONE WRITTEN DOWN IS ELIGIBLE BASED ON AGE - SIGNATURE - ELIGIBILITY <p>What do you think happens after you've returned this form?</p>	7 mins

Key Themes	Specific Question Areas	Timings (approximate)
	IF HEF FORM ALL THOSE NAMED WILL RECEIVE AN INDIVIDUAL FORM TO REGISTER. EXPLAIN THAT THIS IS A NEW SYSTEM, AND THIS FORM INFORMS THE SENDING OF INDIVIDUAL REGISTRATION FORMS WHICH NEED TO BE COMPLETED BY INDIVIDUALS IN ORDER TO REGISTER	
<p><u>HEF FORM</u></p> <p>Usefulness of supporting materials</p>	<p>Did you need to read the instructions/guidance materials at all?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which sections did you need it for? Why? Anything in particular that you needed help understanding? - Were they helpful? In what way? Any particular words or phrases that helped? - What needed to be clearer? How? <p>Was there anything missing that would have made this easier to complete?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you want or need any more information? What? Why? - NOTE TO MODERATOR: LINK TO PREVIOUS ANSWERS ABOUT HOW ISSUES CAN BE RESOLVED. EG. IF SOMETHING SPECIFIC CAUSED A PROBLEM/CONCERN, WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED TO REASSURE/EXPLAIN - Probe for detail 	3 mins
<p><u>IER FORM</u></p> <p>Understanding the purpose of the forms and general ease of understanding</p>	<p>INTRO FOR INDIVIDUAL REGISTRATION FORM</p> <p>Imagine you or someone in your household has sent back the Household Enquiry Form. Then this form arrives in the post from your local council, addressed to you personally. It has a letter with it inviting you to register to vote, and asking you to complete and return the form.</p> <p>What was this form asking you to do?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • What was clear/unclear about the form? <p>How easy or difficult did you find completing this form? Why?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there anything you didn't understand or was not clear? - Did the order of the form make sense? Was there anything you felt 	10 mins

Key Themes	Specific Question Areas	Timings (approximate)
	<p>didn't flow well or was confusing?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Anything that would make it easier to complete/answer questions? - Probe for reasons why <p>Did you read everything fully, scan it, or did you skip any of it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Why did you scan/skip that aspect? <p>Did anything stand out as odd or concerning? PROBE FOR ANY PARTICULAR WORDS OR PHRASES</p> <p>PROBE ON THE 'OFFENCE-FINE' WARNING</p> <p>Was there anything you were asked to provide you felt uncomfortable about? Not sure why you were asked for it?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - PROBE ON: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - CHANGE OF NAME - DATE OF BIRTH/AGE – under 18, over 70 - NATIONAL INSURANCE NUMBER - NATIONALITY - IMMIGRATION STATUS (where applicable) - SECOND HOME - FULL/EDITED REGISTER - SIGNATURE/DECLARATION <p>What do you think happens after you've returned this form?</p> <p>IF FORM HAS BEEN COMPLETED IN FULL (i.e. no need for ERO to write for further information/evidence), INDIVIDUALS WILL BE ADDED TO REGISTER (AND WOULD THEREFORE RECEIVE POLL CARDS AT ELECTION TIME ETC.)</p>	
<p><u>IER FORM</u></p> <p>Usefulness of</p>	<p>Did you need to read the instructions/guidance materials at all?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Which sections did you need it for? Why? Anything in particular that 	3 mins

Key Themes	Specific Question Areas	Timings (approximate)
supporting materials	<p>you needed help understanding?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Were they helpful? In what way? Any particular words or phrases that helped? - What needed to be clearer? How? <p>Was there anything missing that would have made this easier to complete?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Did you want or need any more information? What? Why? - NOTE TO MODERATOR: LINK TO PREVIOUS ANSWERS ABOUT HOW ISSUES CAN BE RESOLVED. EG. IF SOMETHING SPECIFIC CAUSED A PROBLEM/CONCERN, WHAT WOULD BE NEEDED TO REASSURE/EXPLAIN <p>Probe for detail</p>	
Wrap up	<p>And finally, what would you say are the two most important things that we need to do in order to make these forms easy to understand?</p> <p>NOTE TO MODERATOR: REMIND PARTICIPANT IF NEEDED THAT WE ARE ASKING SPECIFICALLY ABOUT CONTENT/WORDING/UNDERSTANDING AND NOT THE DESIGN OF THE FORM</p> <p>Is there anything else you would like to add?</p> <p>Thank and close</p>	2 mins

Appendix 2: Network interview discussion guide

12-066848-01 Electoral Commission IER form testing

<p>Information about the forms</p>	<p>Intro for Household Enquiry Form (HEF): This form would arrive in the post just after someone has moved house from the local council. It is addressed to 'the occupant'.</p> <p>Intro for electoral registration form This form arrives in the post from the local council, addressed to individuals by name. It comes to all those named in the HEF. It has a letter with it inviting the individual to register to vote.</p>
<p><u>HEF FORM</u></p>	<p><u>Understanding the purpose of the forms and general ease of understanding</u></p> <p>Was it clear what the forms are asking people to do?</p> <p>How easy or difficult is the form to complete?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there anything this is difficult to understand or was not clear? - Any words or phrases that are difficult to understand or thought didn't make sense? Why? <p>Is there any information asked for that causes concern or people may not be comfortable providing?</p> <p>Were any questions not clear? Need to be presented better? Explained more?</p> <p><u>Usefulness of supporting materials</u></p> <p>Were the instructions/guidance materials clear? Were they helpful? Why? Did they provide all the information needed?</p> <p>What other information/points of clarification were needed?</p> <p>Was there anything missing that would have made the form easier to complete/understand?</p>

<u>ER FORM</u>	<p><u>Understanding the purpose of the forms and general ease of understanding</u></p> <p>Was it clear what the forms are asking people to do?</p> <p>How easy or difficult is the form to complete?</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Was there anything this is difficult to understand or was not clear? - Any words or phrases that are difficult to understand or thought didn't make sense? Why? <p>Did anything stand out as odd or concerning? Any particular words or phrases?</p> <p>Is there any information asked for that causes concern or people may not be comfortable providing?</p> <p>Were any questions not clear? Need to be presented better? Explained more?</p> <p><u>Usefulness of supporting materials</u></p> <p>Were the instructions/guidance materials clear? Were they helpful? Why? Did they provide all the information needed?</p> <p>What other information/points of clarification were needed?</p> <p>Was there anything missing that would have made the form easier to complete/understand?</p>
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Appendix 3: HEF materials – form and guidance

Electoral registration: household enquiry form

About this form

This form collects information about the people who are resident at this address, which we will use to keep the electoral register accurate and up to date. We will write to each person whose details are given on this form to invite them to register to vote.

You are required by law to give the information asked for in this form. It is an offence not to give this information or to knowingly provide false information. If you commit an offence you could face a fine of up to £5,000 or imprisonment of up to six months.

Please:

- Complete this form
- Complete and sign the declaration
- Return the form to your Electoral Registration Officer at:

If you need any help when completing this form please phone **[CONTACT NUMBER]**.

Eligibility to register to vote

To register to vote, you must be aged 17 or over (although you cannot vote until you are 18), **and either:**

- a British, Irish or European Union citizen, **or**
- a Commonwealth citizen who has leave to enter or remain in the UK or does not require such leave

Please see the notes for more information on eligibility.

Residents' details

Please use **black ink** and write in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Please turn over >

Please give the details of each person aged 17 or over and resident at this address.

1) First name(s).....

Surname.....

Aged under 18? Please tick

Aged over 70? Please tick

2) First name(s).....

Surname.....

Aged under 18? Please tick

Aged over 70? Please tick

3) First name(s).....

Surname.....

Aged under 18? Please tick

Aged over 70? Please tick

4) First name(s).....

Surname.....

Aged under 18? Please tick

Aged over 70? Please tick

Declaration

One person who is resident at this address must complete this declaration.

- As far as I know the information provided on this form is true.

Signature.....

Full name (print).....

Electoral registration: household enquiry form

Notes

Eligibility to register to vote: nationality requirements

British citizens, Irish citizens and qualifying citizens of Commonwealth countries (including Cyprus and Malta) can vote at all elections. Citizens of other EU member states resident in the UK can vote in local government elections but not in UK Parliamentary elections. Those resident in Scotland or Wales can also vote in Scottish Parliamentary or National Assembly for Wales elections.

Residence

People can register only for an address where they are resident. You should include:

- People who are temporarily away – for example, away working, on holiday, in student accommodation or in hospital.
- Any other residents, lodgers or guests (but not short stay visitors) at this address.

Personal data

We will store your personal data securely and in accordance with Data Protection requirements. We will use the information provided on this form to contact people who are, or who may be eligible to register to vote. We will not disclose any information to any other individual or organisation except if required to do so by law.

Appendix 4: IER materials – forms and guidance

Electoral registration form

About this form

You must be on the electoral register to vote in elections and referendums. Use this form to apply to register to vote.

You must be **aged 17 or over** to register (although you cannot vote until you are 18).

To register to vote:

- Complete this form
- Sign the declaration
- Return the form to your Electoral Registration Officer at:

[COUNCIL ADDRESS]

If you need any help when completing this form phone **[CONTACT NUMBER]**.

About the information you give us

We will use the information you give on this form to keep the electoral register accurate and up to date. Please see the notes for more information.

It is an offence to knowingly give false information on this form. If you do, you could face a fine of up to £5,000 or imprisonment of up to six months.

Completing this form

Only one person can register using this form.

Please use **black ink** and write in CAPITAL LETTERS.

Please turn over >

About you**1) Your name**

First name(s)

Middle name(s)

Surname

2) Any other name you have had in the last twelve months

.....

If you are already registered to vote and are using this form to tell us you have changed your name, please tick here

We will need to ask you for proof of your name change. We will write to you about this.

3) Date of birth (day/month/year)

__/__/____

If you have answered this question, please go straight to question **4**.

3a) If you are unable to tell us your date of birth, please say why.

.....

Are you:

Aged under 18? Please tick Aged over 70? Please tick

We will need to ask you for proof of your identity. We will write to you about this.

Please turn over >

4) National insurance number (for example AB 123456 D):

— — — — —

You can find this on payslips, letters about benefits or pensions or letters from the tax office. If you can't find your number or don't have one, contact your local tax office on 0845 300 0627.

If you have answered this question, please go straight to question **5**.

4a) If you are unable to tell us your national insurance number, please say why.

.....

We will need to ask you for proof of your identity. We will write to you about this.

5) Nationality

To register to vote you must be one of the following:

-
- a British, Irish or European Union citizen, **or**
- a Commonwealth citizen who has leave to enter or remain in the UK or does not require such leave

Please tell us your nationality (if you have dual nationality, include both):

.....

We may need to ask you for proof of your nationality. If so, we will write to you about this.

If you are a citizen of a Commonwealth country that is not in the EU go to question **5a**.

Otherwise go to question **6**.

5a) For non-EU Commonwealth citizens:

What is your immigration status?

.....

We may need to ask you for proof of your immigration status. If so, we will write to you about this.

Please turn over >

Your home address

6) Home address where you are currently resident

.....
.....
.....
.....

Postcode.....

7) Any other address(es) where you are currently resident:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Postcode.....

8) Any address(es) where you have stopped being resident in the last twelve months:

.....
.....
.....
.....

Postcode.....

If you were registered to vote at another address, your name will be taken off the register for that address. However, if you believe you should still also be registered there, please tell us why.

.....

Please turn over >

Other information

- 9) If you **do not** want your name and address to appear on the **edited register** which is available for general sale and can be used for any purpose including commercial activities such as marketing, tick here

The **full electoral register** is used mainly for elections and referendums, and can also be used for preventing and detecting crime and checking applications for credit.

- 10) Tick a box if you would like an application form to:

- Vote by post
 Vote by proxy (to appoint someone to vote on your behalf)

Declaration

- I understand that the information I have given on this form may be used to add my details to the electoral register.
-
- As far as I know the information I have given on this form is true.

Your signature.....

Electoral registration form

Notes

Your personal data

We will store your personal data securely and in accordance with Data Protection requirements. Your name and address will appear on the electoral register. We only use your date of birth and national insurance number to check your identity and these will not appear on the electoral register.

We will not disclose any information to any other individual or organisation except if required to do so by law.

Eligibility to register to vote: nationality requirements.

British citizens, Irish citizens and qualifying citizens of Commonwealth countries (including Cyprus and Malta) can vote at all elections.

Citizens of other EU member states resident in the UK can vote in local government elections but not in UK Parliamentary elections. Those resident in Scotland or Wales can also vote in Scottish Parliamentary or National Assembly for Wales elections.