

Declarations of identity (Northern Ireland)

Function

Postal voters in Northern Ireland have to complete a declaration of identity and return it along with their ballot paper for their vote to be counted. The voter must complete their declaration of identity in the presence of a witness, who must then complete the witness declaration section on the same document.

Postal voting materials have several functions: to enable the voter to vote on the ballot paper; to obtain the voter's personal identifiers and witness's details; and to enable the voter to return their vote in time for it to be counted.

Because voting by post is relatively complex, involving at least two documents the voter must complete, plus two envelopes in which to enclose and return the documents, it is crucial that the materials provide clear, simple instructions, which are easy to follow, and that the documents themselves are similarly clear and simple to use. Postal voting is often used by people who would experience particular barriers to voting, and feel it is easier to vote at home. Postal voting should not be more difficult than voting in a polling station and the process itself should not act as a barrier to the voter.

Style

- Print the declaration of identity in A4 size.



Example
declaration
of identity
(Appendix 2)



Explanation

- A4 size allows for text to be in a large enough font size to be easily read, with enough space to lay out the information clearly, and enough room for the sections that have to be filled in.

- Give each separate section of the declaration of identity a heading.

i Explanation

- Headings help guide people through the declaration of identity and understand what each part is about.
- Headings also help to break up the declaration of identity into smaller sections, so it looks easier to read, rather than just having a continuous body of text.
- Headings also mean people can quickly find the section they want (e.g. 'how to get help').

- Keep the voter and witness sections clearly separate and label each so it is clear which section is for the voter to complete, and which is for the witness.

i Explanation

- Labelling each section and making them visually distinct makes it clear that there are two sections to be completed by two different people.

- Make it clear which sections of the declaration the voter needs to complete, and what with (i.e. date of birth, not the date that they signed it), and make them stand out:
 - Use bold lines to highlight boxes.
 - Use arrows to signpost to the boxes that need to be filled in.
 - Put a label next to the box to say what should go in it.
 - Avoid using 'DD/MM/YYYY' labels. Use the full words: 'day', 'month', 'year'.
- Ensure the signature box is large enough to accommodate long or large signatures.
- Put a solid border around the signature box so it is clear what space the voter has to keep inside. A pale grey or thin line is not easy to see.

Content and structure

- In the written information and instructions, include information about deadlines and timescales (e.g. when talking about getting a replacement ballot paper, or returning your vote). Include:

- when each deadline is
- what to do if you have missed the deadline, or think you might miss it

i Explanation

- Including information about deadlines makes sure people know exactly when they need to do things by, and means they do not lose out on their right to vote if they think they have missed the deadline.
- Include information about what to do if you make a mistake or need another declaration of identity or ballot paper. The information should:
 - be prominent, and included early on in the declaration of identity
 - be repeated or referred to at other key points where the voter may need help or assistance
 - include information about call costs if help is available by telephone

i Explanation

- It should be clear to the voter from the outset that they can get help if they need it, and how to do so, so that they are not put off completing and returning their vote if they get stuck.
 - Many people will be on their own without access to someone to help them. Making it clear that help is available reassures the voter and encourages them to seek assistance if they need it, and avoids them having to struggle unnecessarily.
 - People want to know how much a telephone number costs before they ring it – they may be put off if it is not a free phone or local rate number.
- Put the signature box as the last task the voter has to complete.

i Explanation

- Having the signature last fits with the usual way of completing a form. People think when they have signed, they have finished, and will stop. Anything they need to complete on the declaration should come before this.