REFERENDUM ON MEMBERSHIP OF THE EUROPEAN UNION: QUESTION TESTING

Report for the Electoral Commission exploring the intelligibility of the proposed referendum question for the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union

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1 Executive Summary

Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA), the Electoral Commission is required to comment on the intelligibility of referendum questions as soon as is reasonably practicable after the introduction of a Bill containing a question. The European Union (Referendum) Bill, which is a Private Members’ Bill introduced by James Wharton MP, passed its second reading on 5th July 2013. Following this, the Electoral Commission initiated their standard question assessment process. Part of the assessment process requires the Commission to gather evidence from the general public on the intelligibility of the proposed referendum question. GfK NOP was commissioned to carry out this element of the research.

The research used a qualitative method, which involved 15 focus groups, 26 full in-depth interviews and 103 mini-depth interviews. The qualitative approach enabled the research team to fully explore how participants interpreted and responded to the questions, as well as allowing opportunity to fully investigate participants’ understanding of the literal and contextual meaning behind them. The original question put forward in the European Union (Referendum) Bill was tested along with five other versions, in order to test potential changes to the wording and see whether they improved the question, in terms of making it easier to understand and answer.

A) Contextual knowledge

The research found low levels of contextual understanding of the European Union, with some participants having no knowledge of the European Union, or the status of UK membership of the EU, at all. Most reported that they felt under informed about the subject matter as well as the arguments for and against the United Kingdom remaining a member.

A consequence of low levels of knowledge was that participants were typically answering the questions based upon the small amount of knowledge they did hold. Participants were often confident about the initial vote they had cast at the outset of the research session, but as the discussion progressed, most also recognised that their own knowledge of the subject matter was lacking. Most focused their requirements for further information around what the ‘pros and cons’ of membership of the European Union are, as they felt knowing this would help them to make a more informed vote.

B) Individual question feedback

Overall, the majority of participants were able to answer the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and the alternatively worded versions in the way they had intended. Most clearly understood that they were being asked to vote on whether they wished the United Kingdom to remain a member of the European Union or not. Most found the wording, language and structure of the questions easy to understand, straightforward, and to the point.

The feedback for each question was similar for both the English and Welsh language versions.
**The proposed referendum question (Question 1)**

“Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?”
YES / NO

Whilst participants noted the language used in this question was simple and in plain English, many felt that it was misleading because it does not make clear that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union.

The phrase ‘be a member’ in the question was felt by many to imply that they are being asked whether the United Kingdom should become a member, rather than if it should remain a member. This caused some participants to think that they were being asked to vote on the United Kingdom joining the European Union. Even those aware of the current membership status agreed that this could be misleading.

Most participants felt the question should be changed to reflect current membership status. This most frequently involved changing the phrase ‘be a member’ to:

- Remained a member
- Continue to be a member
- Still be a member
- Stay a member

When thinking further about the language used in this question, the phrase ‘do you think’ was met with a mixed response. Those who liked this phrase noted that it sounded more personal, posing the question directly to the individual and encouraging them to consider their response carefully. Those less keen on the phrase felt that it sounded less concrete and spontaneously suggested changing it to the word ‘should’.

Although the majority of participants felt this question was potentially misleading, some felt that because it did not specifically discuss the United Kingdom’s current membership status, it was actually a fair and neutral way to ask the question. However, a few participants felt that the phrase ‘should be a member’ could potentially be biased towards a ‘yes’ vote because it could be interpreted as them being told the United Kingdom ‘should be a member’. There was no evidence that participants’ own votes were led by this phrase as they answered in line with their own intentions.

**Questions 2 & 3**

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?”
YES / NO

“Should the United Kingdom continue to be a member of the European Union?”
YES / NO

These two questions were developed prior to fieldwork by the Electoral Commission to test alongside Question 1 in order to help participants identify which factors might improve or worsen the intelligibility of the question wording.
The language and wording used in these questions (which are addressed together because of their wording similarity) was found to be simple and straightforward by the majority of participants. The questions benefited from the inclusion of the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’, clarifying that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union. Most felt this was an important clarification to make as it meant participants were much more confident that they were being asked to vote on whether the United Kingdom should remain a member of the European Union, or not.

There was no evidence that the terms ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ were difficult to understand. When prompted to evaluate the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’, many participants expressed mixed views regarding whether these words were leading in the context of the question. However, despite some perceptions of bias, which cut across participants with different voting preferences, there was no evidence that either of the questions led people to vote in a particular way.

It was also clear that these perceptions of bias were not strong and most participants described ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ as being plain and ordinary language that did not affect how they interpreted the question.

**Question 4**

“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”

Remain a member of the European Union / Leave the European Union

The main criticism made by some participants about this question was that they perceived it to be overly wordy and long-winded with some low literacy participants re-reading the full question in order to ensure they understood it. However, it is important to note that this comment was typically raised when participants compared Question 4 to other shorter question versions. Other participants were keen to note that including the two ‘remain’ and ‘leave’ answer options improved the clarity of the question allowing the voter to feel sure of the meaning of each option. With these comments in mind, there was no evidence that any of the participants were unable to answer this question or that they answered differently from the way they intended.

Many of the participants preferred Question 4 because they felt that including the two options, ‘remain’ and ‘leave’, resulted in a balanced question that treated both voting options equally.

**Question 5**

“The United Kingdom is a member of the European Union. Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?”

YES / NO

This question was well received by many because it includes the preamble clarifying current membership status of the European Union. They felt this was an important addition, as not everyone would be aware of current membership status.
However, the phrase ‘be a member’ in the question still caused confusion for some participants. These participants felt that the preamble contradicts the wording of the question as the reader is informed that the United Kingdom is a member of the European Union, and then asked if the United Kingdom wants to ‘become’ a member. This caused some participants to question why they were being asked if they want the United Kingdom to become a member of the European Union when it already is one.

For this reason, many suggested changes to the phrase ‘be a member’ in line with those for the proposed referendum question (Question 1). For example, change ‘be a member’ to ‘remain a member’ or ‘continue to be a member’.

**Question 6**

“Should the United Kingdom leave the European Union?”

YES / NO

Question 6 was considered to be clear and concise making it easy to read and understand. However, it was the least preferred question of the six for the majority who saw it.

This was because participants, regardless of their voting preference, felt the word ‘leave’ (in the absence of an alternative, as in Question 4) had a ‘strong’ and negative presence which heavily biased the question to a ‘yes’ vote. This was raised both spontaneously by participants who had only seen this version of the question, and was prompted by comparisons with Questions 4 and 5.

In a few cases, participants felt that the simplicity of the question meant it was the easiest to answer and so was their preferred choice. This was typically voiced by participants with English as a second language or low literacy levels who felt that their perception of the question as being to the point made it the most suitable question to ask. However, this was very much a minority viewpoint as overall, participants voiced negative concerns regarding this question and felt that it was too biased to be appropriate for a referendum question.

However, it is important to note that despite the majority of participants who saw the question being concerned about potential bias, there was no evidence that any of the participants answered the question differently to how they intended.

**C) Overall fit with assessment guidelines**

**Be easy to understand**

Overall, most participants found the language used in the questions easy to understand. The wording and phrasing of the questions presented very little difficulty for most participants, including those for who English is a second language and people with low levels of literacy or learning difficulties.

The proposed referendum question (Question 1), and to a lesser extent Question 5, were less easy to understand for some participants based on their contextual knowledge of current membership status. This lack of contextual knowledge meant they incorrectly interpreted the phrase ‘be a member’ to mean that they were being asked if the United Kingdom should become a member of the European Union, as
opposed to whether membership should continue. These two questions were felt to be misleading because they do not make clear that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union.

**To the point**
Apart from Question 4 which some perceived to be overly wordy, the other five questions were felt to be to the point.

**Be unambiguous**
The proposed referendum question (Question 1) and Question 5 were felt to be potentially ambiguous because they do not clarify the United Kingdom’s current membership status. The other four questions were felt to be unambiguous in terms of the actual wording used.

**Avoid encouraging voters to consider one response more favourably than another**
The participants identified perceived bias in all six versions of the question relating to particular words or phrasing, especially for Question 6. However, whilst many participants discussed the potential for certain words and phrasing in the questions to be leading, overall there was little evidence that these concerns were borne out in reality. Overall Question 4 was thought to be the most neutral as it seemed to provide an equal treatment of both voting options.

**Avoid misleading voters**
As discussed above, the proposed referendum question (Question 1), and to a lesser extent Question 5, did cause some participants to misinterpret what the referendum involved. The phrase ‘be a member’ led participants with little to no awareness of the United Kingdom’s current membership status, to misunderstand the question and think the vote was about whether to become a member or not, rather than about remaining a member or not.

**D) Conclusion**
The research suggests that questions 2, 3 and 4 are all suitable for use in a referendum. An overview of these questions is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Neutrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| **Question 2 and Question 3** | ✓ Short and concise.  
 ✓ Clarifies current membership status.  
 | ? The words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ could introduce some bias and lead to some assumptions on the part of the voter. However, these were mild concerns and there was no evidence that they actually caused participants to vote in a particular way. |
| **Question 4** | ? Wordy and long-winded.  
 ✓ Clarifies current membership status.  
 ✓ Clarifies each voting option.  
 | ✓ Balanced, presenting both voting options with equal treatment. |
2 Introduction

2.1 Background

The Electoral Commission is an independent body established by the UK Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). Its aim is to maintain the integrity of and public confidence in the democratic process. Under PPERA, the Commission is required to comment on the intelligibility of referendum questions at a UK, national and regional level.

Under PPERA, the Commission is required to comment on the intelligibility of referendum questions as soon as is reasonably practicable after the introduction of a Bill containing a question. The European Union (Referendum) Bill, which is a Private Members’ Bill introduced by James Wharton MP, passed its second reading on 5 July 2013. Following this, the Electoral Commission initiated their standard question assessment process.

The EU (Referendum) Bill does not include a version of the question in Welsh, but provides for a version to be specified by order so that it can be included on ballot papers in Wales. Following requests from James Wharton MP and the Welsh Language Commissioner, the Electoral Commission included in their assessment process a version of the question in the Welsh language.

The Electoral Commission’s question assessment process gathers evidence from a number of sources including:

- The general public;
- Experts on accessibility and plain language, and the Welsh Language Commissioner;
- Political parties and campaign groups associated with the referendum, and;
- Other key groups or individuals who have an interest in the referendum and its outcome.

The Electoral Commission contracted GfK NOP to carry out research with the general public to:

- Identify any elements of the referendum question which prove problematic for users in the context of our question assessment guidelines;
- Explore the reasons for these problems; and,
- Explore possible ways of addressing these problems.
2.2 Objectives

The aim of this research was to gain insights into how voters in the United Kingdom reacted to and understood the proposed referendum question. In particular, the objectives of this research were to:

- Identify any elements of the referendum question which proved problematic for users in the context of the Electoral Commission’s assessment guidelines:
  - Explore the extent to which the question is easy to understand
  - Understand the extent to which the information contained in the question is factual, clear and accurate
  - Identify any elements of the question which are ambiguous
  - Understand if, and where, the question encourages voters to consider one response more favourably than another
  - Identify whether the question misleads voters in any way

- Explore the reasons for these problems:
  - Understand which particular words or phrases cause problems
  - Identify where jargon or technical terms are perceived to have been used
  - Identify any problems with the tone of the language used

- Explore possible ways of addressing these problems:
  - Capture participants’ suggestions for improvements
  - Test iterations of the questions
  - Explore what additional information is required, other than what is on the ballot paper, to help voters understand the contextual meaning of the question and the implications of the referendum outcomes, in order to enable voters to cast an informed vote
2.3 The question testing process

There were six versions of the question shown across the research and the fieldwork for the research took place in three stages. Question 1 was the question that was included in the EU (Referendum) Bill. Questions 2 and 3 were developed prior to fieldwork by the Electoral Commission to test alongside Question 1 to stimulate discussion and test potential alternative wording. Questions 4, 5 and 6 were developed based on findings from the pilot and the first part of the main stage of fieldwork to further stimulate discussion on alternative wording.

The fieldwork was conducted in three stages to allow for an iterative process whereby feedback from each stage was used to make alterations and develop new questions to test in subsequent phases. Table 1 below highlights which questions were tested.

Table 1

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Question number</th>
<th>Question wording</th>
<th>Answer options</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1.</td>
<td>Do you think that the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2.</td>
<td>Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3.</td>
<td>Should the United Kingdom continue to be a member of the European Union?</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4.</td>
<td>Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?</td>
<td>Remain a member of the European Union / Leave the European Union</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5.</td>
<td>The United Kingdom is a member of the European Union. Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6.</td>
<td>Should the United Kingdom leave the European Union?</td>
<td>Yes / No</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Table 2 below shows the questions tested at each stage of the fieldwork. The order the questions were shown in was rotated across the focus groups, full depth

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1 The approach taken to creating alternatives ahead of fieldwork was to start with small amendments to the proposed question. Subsequent alternatives were developed based on emerging fieldwork findings.

2 Please note that all questions were tested in Welsh. See appendix 9.4
interviews and mini-depth interviews to reduce the likelihood of research bias being introduced.\footnote{The exception to this was that following the pilot sessions; the proposed referendum question (Q1) was shown first in all the groups in stages 1 and 2. This was because Q2 and Q3 potentially informed participants that the UK is currently a member of the EU, which, in some cases, Q1 did not. To avoid informing people unaware of current membership prior to discussion, Q1 was shown first. More details on the interpretation issues can be found in section 4.}

**Table 2**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Project Stage</th>
<th>Fieldwork</th>
<th>Locations</th>
<th>Questions Tested</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Pilot</td>
<td>2 x focus groups</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Q1, Q2, Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Stage Part 1</td>
<td>7 x focus groups 10 x in-depths 45 x mini-depths</td>
<td>Omagh Aberystwyth Glasgow Belfast Leeds</td>
<td>Q1, Q2, Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Question 4 developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Main Stage Part 2</td>
<td>6 x focus groups 6 x in-depths 36 x mini-depths</td>
<td>Aberdeen Merthyr Nottingham Colwyn Bay Exeter</td>
<td>Q1, Q2, Q3, Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Questions 5 &amp; 6 developed</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Stage</td>
<td>10 x in-depths 20 x mini-depths</td>
<td>London Cardiff</td>
<td>Q4, Q5, Q6</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participants in the mini-depth interviews in stages one and two of the fieldwork only saw two versions of the question due to time constraints. Question 1 was shown in every mini-depth interview whilst questions 2, 3 and 4 were rotated so participants saw one of these alternative versions to ensure as much detailed feedback as possible was gathered about each question. In the final stage, mini-depth participants saw three versions of the question (4, 5 and 6). The research had already gathered a large amount of feedback relating to individual words and phrases in the first two stages of the research so although showing three versions of the question reduced the amount of time dedicated to each question, it did enable us to gather more in depth feedback around preferences for the wording. Given that the final phase did not feature any group discussions, it was felt to be important to test all these versions with as many of the individual participants as possible.
In the focus groups and in-depth interviews, all of the questions were shown in each session on rotation. Appendix 9.2 has the full rotation plan.

This research did not test the layout or structure of the ballot paper itself but focused on the language used in the wording of the question. Unless stated otherwise, where this report refers to the ‘questions’ we mean the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and all five of the alternative versions. Where findings relate to specific versions of the question then we will refer to those questions by the number allocated to them in the table above.

All six versions were tested in English and Welsh using a mock ballot paper format to simulate a real life voting setting. Appendix 9.4 has a full breakdown of the English language and bi-lingual Welsh ballot papers that were shown to the research participants.

4 Except the proposed referendum question (Question 1) which was shown 1st in all the groups in stages 1 and 2 of the fieldwork.
2.4 Research approach

2.4.1 Method

The research used a qualitative method, which involved 15 focus groups, 26 full in-depth interviews and 103 mini-depth interviews. The qualitative approach enabled the research team to fully explore how participants interpreted and responded to the questions, as well as allowing opportunity to fully investigate participants’ understanding of the literal and contextual meaning behind them. The contextual understanding focused on participants’ understanding of the European Union and the perceived implications of voting in a particular way. This enabled the research to fully explore the extent to which participants understood the questions and how this understanding affected the responses they gave. The research also identified how any issues in understanding the question could be addressed.

The research used a mix of qualitative methods in order to gather a broad range of feedback:

- Focus groups provided an open forum where participants shared their ideas with each other. The discursive nature of a group setting was ideal for gathering nuanced feedback about the different versions of the question and generating ideas for improvement. The focus groups lasted one and a half hours each.
- In-depth interviews provided a private forum for discussion where the participant’s individual point of view was explored in depth. The private nature of an interview meant participants were comfortable in revealing areas of the questions they found confusing, misleading or difficult to understand. 10 of the depth interviews were held with the general public, whilst the remaining 16 were broken down into:
  - 4 x Welsh language
  - 4 x learning difficulties
  - 4 x low literacy levels
4 x English as a second language

The in-depth interviews lasted between 45 minutes to one hour.

- Mini-depth interviews are a short version of an in-depth interview lasting between 15-20 minutes each. They were an ideal way of gathering literal interpretations of two to three versions of the questions from a wide range of the general public. This meant we were able to include a broad sample of people within the research by using this method.

The discussion in the focus groups and the depth interviews followed the flow outlined in the diagram below. The mini-depth interviews were a shorter version of this discussion. Appendix 9.1 details the full discussion guides.

2.4.2 Sample

The sample was made up of:

- 15 focus groups
- 26 in-depth interviews
- 103 mini-depth interviews

These were split across all four countries of the United Kingdom combining a mix of urban and rural areas. The specific locations were:

- Wales: Cardiff, Merthyr Tydfil, Aberystwyth & Colwyn Bay
- Scotland: Aberdeen & Glasgow
- Northern Ireland: Omagh & Belfast
The locations were chosen to ensure that we included a spread of the public with a broad range of demographic characteristics.

Fieldwork was carried out between the 21st August and 13th September 2013.

**A) Focus groups**

The focus groups lasted 1.5 hours and included 6-8 participants in each group. The table below gives an overview of the sample. A full breakdown is included in the appendices at section 9.2. Some groups contained people from rural areas, which are noted in the table.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Key quotas (all groups with mix of gender)</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td>Age: 17-24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: BC1C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2</td>
<td>Nottingham</td>
<td>Age: 60+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Irregular / non-voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exeter</td>
<td>Age: 45-59 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Included rural participants</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>4</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Age: 25-44 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: BC1C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>5</td>
<td>London</td>
<td>Age: 45-69 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Irregular / non-voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>6</td>
<td>Colwyn Bay</td>
<td>Age: 25-44 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Irregular / non-voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Welsh language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>7</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil</td>
<td>Age: 45-59 years old</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: BC1C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Welsh language</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>8</td>
<td>Aberystwyth</td>
<td>Age: 60+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: BC1C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>9</td>
<td>Merthyr Tydfil</td>
<td>Age: 17-24 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Irregular / non voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>10</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Age: 25-44 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: BC1C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Participants from rural locations</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>11</td>
<td>Glasgow</td>
<td>Age: 45-59 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Irregular / non-voters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>12</td>
<td>Aberdeen</td>
<td>Age: 60+ years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: C2DE</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>13</td>
<td>Belfast</td>
<td>Age: 45-59 years</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>SEG: BC1C2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Voting: Regular</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Mix of Catholic and Protestant religion</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Within each group we sought to include a spread of:

- Individual attitudes towards the importance of the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union to ensure a broad range of views
- Newspaper readership (as this tends to be a useful proxy for gathering alternative political viewpoints)

The proportion of respondents that answered ‘yes’ or ‘no’ to the referendum questions were monitored via the completed mock ballot papers to ensure a reasonable mix.

**Voting behaviour:** Groups were stratified according to their voting behaviour. People who ‘always’ or ‘usually’ voted were classified as regular voters, while those who ‘sometimes’ or ‘never’ voted were classified as ‘irregular / non-voters’. Where participants were previously ineligible to vote, they were then classified according to what they felt their behaviour would be in the future.

**Religion:** In Northern Ireland, we recruited some people of Catholic and Protestant religion to each of the three groups held there to ensure the discussion was representative.

**Demographic characteristics:** Each group was stratified by:

- Age
- Socio-economic group

Including people of similar ages and socio-economic backgrounds in the group together creates good group dynamics which helps to stimulate discussion and debate.

Ethnicity was representative of the local area in each location.

**B) In-depth interviews**

We carried out 26 in-depth interviews across the research locations. The overall sample breakdown was:

- 14 interviews with the general public:
  - 7 x regular voters
  - 7 x irregular / non-voters
- 4 x English as a second language
- 4 x low literacy level
- 4 x learning difficulties
Similar to the focus groups, participants in the in-depth interviews reflected a broad spread of attitudes towards the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union, as well as different behaviour related to voting generally. We included a broad spread of demographic characteristics across the 26 interviews. Again, newspaper readership was also screened to help ensure a spread of political views.

A full breakdown of the in-depth interview sample by individual participant is available in the appendices at section 9.2.

C) Mini depth interviews

We aimed to conduct 100 mini-depth interviews across the research locations and achieved 103.\(^5\) A full breakdown of the quotas achieved is available in the appendix at section 9.2. The overall breakdown was:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Gender</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Male</td>
<td>50</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Female</td>
<td>53</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Age</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>17-24</td>
<td>21</td>
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<tr>
<td>25-34</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
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<tr>
<td>60-69</td>
<td>20</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>70+</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Social grade:</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>B</td>
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<tr>
<td>C1</td>
<td>25</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>C2</td>
<td>14</td>
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<tr>
<td>D</td>
<td>16</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>E</td>
<td>22</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ethnicity</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Ethnic minority group</td>
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</tbody>
</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Voting behaviour</th>
<th>TOTAL</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I always vote at General Elections</td>
<td>49</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I usually vote at General Elections</td>
<td>26</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I sometimes vote at General Elections</td>
<td>12</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I never vote at General Elections</td>
<td>15</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Participant’s attitudes towards the European Union covered a broad spectrum from people with an ‘anti-EU’ stance to those with a ‘pro-EU point of view’, which was monitored through ballot paper votes cast during the interview. This ensured that we incorporated a range of perspectives on the questions.

\(^5\) We over recruited by a few interviews to ensure that we had at least 100 interviews
2.5 Strengths and limitations of the research

Employing a qualitative approach to the research to explore how people responded to the EU referendum questions allowed researchers to gather rich insights into their understanding and interpretation of the question. These insights were increased by using a blend of group discussions and individual interviews. The in-depth and mini depth interviews simulated a real voting experience and gathered deep individual views and attitudes towards the question. The group settings provided a discursive forum where the question was debated and evaluated.

The key strength of a qualitative approach is that it enables researchers to gather spontaneous attitudes and insights, as well as highly nuanced feedback about the research questions. Whilst qualitative discussions follow a clear structure, they emphasise the role of the participant in leading and driving the conversation through allowing them to answer in their own words and leading to responses that are full of rich insights. Participants are not limited in the way they answer the questions by being required to choose from multiple-choice answers as they would in a quantitative study.

The main limitation to using a qualitative research approach is that it emphasises self-expression and insight over numerical outcomes and so relies on detailed discussion with relatively small sample sizes. Whilst we included people from a wide range of backgrounds and with a variety of demographic characteristics, the overall sample size means it is not statistically representative. The findings in this report focus on participants understanding and interpretation of the questions, whether the questions are perceived to be misleading in any way, and suggestions for making the questions clearer and easier to answer. The findings do not attempt to quantify the number of participants who preferred specific versions of the question or how many of them would benefit from any changes put forward.

Further, the research was carried out prior to any definitive decision being taken about if or when a referendum on membership of the European Union might be held; although the EU (Referendum) Bill requests that it take place before 2017. This may have affected the contextual awareness that participants had about the European Union.
3 Contextual understanding of the European Union

3.1 Spontaneous knowledge of the European Union

Participants’ spontaneous contextual knowledge and understanding typically fell into a spectrum, which ranged from people who had no awareness of the European Union, to those who had limited knowledge of the European Union, up to those who had a moderate level of knowledge.

The majority understood the term ‘European Union’ to be a form of political and economic union between the countries of Europe; although very few knew how many countries are members. There were very few who had a holistic understanding of how the European Union worked.

“We don’t know enough about the pros and cons of being in the European Union and obviously certain things can happen that you will agree with, but is there a downside to not being in it? What would the downside be?” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Glasgow)

“… the EU…which is a group of countries that come together for a group of legal goals, and the economy and also certain rights that people have.” (Male, aged 31, mini-depth, Aberdeen)

Most knew, or had heard of, specific elements of the European Union or individual policy areas - typically what they had heard from the media or because it related to their undergraduate degrees or current employment. For example, some people had studied elements of the European Union as part of their undergraduate degree, whilst others were aware of particular environmental regulations because they were related to their job.

“I know bits about it but there’s bits I don’t have a clue about so I would have liked more context to it – the different parts.” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, BC1C2, Leeds)

“You suddenly start thinking…do I know enough about it to answer the question? It’s not as straightforward. And you have to kind of read it once or twice to know which one you’re going to answer to put the answer you want.” (Female, aged 37, mini-depth, Colwyn Bay)

There were mixed levels of awareness of the European Union and knowledge relating to it across the sample. Whilst the majority understood the fact that the United Kingdom is a member, a few had no knowledge of this. These participants were likely to report extremely low levels of engagement in politics and political issues generally and tended to state that they would be unlikely to vote in the referendum.

Overall, regardless of their level of knowledge, by the end of the discussion, most participants felt that their personal understanding was low and they felt under-informed about the European Union as an institution, as well as the arguments for and against the United Kingdom remaining a member.
“There should be an option for more information if people are unsure what they are voting for.” (Female, aged 18, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“I’d a like a box for people who don’t know… I’m sure they normally have that for people who are unsure? Otherwise do they just discount people who don’t know?” (Focus group participant, aged 60+, C2DE, Nottingham)

3.2 Impact of lack of knowledge upon voting behaviour

The consequence of low understanding and knowledge about the European Union was that participants typically cast their initial referendum vote based on their attitudes towards the small amount of knowledge they did hold, without tending to realise how little they actually did know. Many participants voted based on single issues which they typically knew about through media coverage or because they had a particular interest in that area. This was true regardless whether their preference was to remain a member or leave the European Union.

The consequence of this was that as the discussion progressed they realised that they lacked good contextual understanding and knowledge regarding the European Union, and what the United Kingdom’s status as a member actually means in practice. As they thought more about the question and their reasons for voting they tended to report that their knowledge was lacking (regardless of how much knowledge they actually held) and that they would require more information before voting.

In some cases, as participants became more aware of their lack of knowledge, or thought more in depth about what being a member of the European Union means, they altered their vote in response to subsequent questions.

As participants’ knowledge of the subject area they were voting on was low, they tended to make assumptions about what the outcome of voting in a particular way would mean. These assumptions were typically based upon factors such as the way they interpreted the wording of the question, or things they had heard in news media relating to the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union.

“If we are remaining then what will [the EU] look like in 5, 10, 20 years’ time? Are we signing up hook, line and sinker to everything that happens?” (Male, aged 44, mini-depth, Cardiff)

Whilst many participants were easily able to cast a vote on the original first question they saw, for some, a lack of knowledge about the European Union meant they found it very difficult to cast a vote. Whilst the majority of participants clearly understood what all of the questions were asking them, some felt very unclear about what voting for or against membership would mean. Many therefore felt unable to cast a vote without further information.

“I think before you vote on something like this that you need to, like I said before you to have at least a brief idea what the European Union is and how the United Kingdom are a part of it and how it affects the United Kingdom.” (Female, aged 24, in-depth interview, Nottingham, Learning difficulties)
In some cases, participants voiced a desire to see a ‘don’t know’ option on the ballot paper as they felt some people would be unable to answer directly one way or the other.

“I think it’s very simple but I don’t think it allows for people who say that they’re not sure.” (Focus group participant, aged 60+, C2DE, Nottingham)
4 Individual question feedback

The next section details the feedback related to each individual question. It is useful to note at this stage some key overarching findings to bear in mind when reading this section:

- The majority of participants understood that the questions were asking them whether they wanted the United Kingdom to still be a member of the European Union, except the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and, to a lesser extent, Question 5 where the phrase ‘be a member’ caused varying levels of confusion for some participants.
- The majority of participants found the language used across the question versions simple and easy to understand. The main concerns raised related to their contextual understanding about the European Union and not the language and words used in the questions.
- Overall, the questions, at least upon initial reading, were felt by most participants to be clear, concise, easy to read, and to the point. The language was described as being ‘laymen’s English’ and felt to be easily accessible. This was true of all participants including those with low literacy levels, learning difficulties and English as a second language.
- The feedback was similar for both the Welsh and English language versions. The Welsh versions are discussed in more detail at section 5.

4.1 Proposed referendum question (Question 1)

A) Understanding of the question

Overall, participants found the language used in this question easy to understand, clear, simple, and straightforward. The language was felt to be in ‘plain English’ that is easily accessible.

“The question is very, very basic – status quo or change the status quo”. (Focus group participant, aged 60+, BC1C2, Aberystwyth)

The overriding concern most participants raised with this question was that they felt it required the reader to know that the United Kingdom is already a member of the European Union in order to be able to correctly interpret what the question is asking. This concern was caused by the phrase ‘be a member’ that many participants felt implies that the United Kingdom is not currently a member. This meant that many participants felt the question could potentially mislead people to think that they are being asked if the United Kingdom should join the European Union, as opposed to remaining or continuing with current membership.
“If you ask me to leave the Tory party, you first have to find out if I’m a member before you ask me to leave.” (Male, aged 55, mini-depth, London, English as second language)

“Not everyone understands that we are in Europe already?” (Focus group participant, aged 25-44, C2DE, Colwyn Bay)

“I don’t think we are a member – I’ve never heard of it [European Union].” (Female, aged 63, mini-depth, Nottingham)

Many of those raising this as a concern were not, themselves, confused and the majority of participants were aware that the United Kingdom is currently a member. Most people were therefore able to answer the question in the way they intended.

However, there were a few participants across the research that were not aware of current membership and so thought they were being asked if the United Kingdom should become a member. This misunderstanding was problematic as participants who had no knowledge based their vote purely on the wording of the question. Some voted to maintain what they understood to be the status quo because they were unclear what they were voting for, so answered ‘no’ to this question which would actually result in them voting to leave the European Union. However, some were led to vote ‘yes’ based on the positive associations they attached to being a ‘member’ – despite not understanding what they were voting to become a member of.

“It makes me think the UK is not a member if it says ‘should be a member’?” (Female, aged 23, mini-depth, Leeds, English as second language)

“I thought I was voting to join. That ['remain a member'] maybe should go on the first question – for people who don’t understand it and know what it is about.” (Female, aged 35, mini-depth, Colwyn Bay)

There were also some participants who were aware that the United Kingdom is a member but that were confused by this question. They were confused about why they were being asked if the United Kingdom should become a member when, as far as they knew, it already was. For example, some participants commented that they felt the question was ‘historical and ‘outdated’ because the United Kingdom is already a member, whilst the question appeared to ask whether the United Kingdom should become a member. These participants felt the question wording was factually incorrect, although it did not affect the way in which they chose to vote.

“…Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member? I mean they are saying they are not a member, do you think they should be? It is a muddling question.” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, B1C2, Belfast)

Participants tended to feel more strongly opposed to this question wording after comparing it with alternative versions, which clarified the United Kingdom’s current
status. It tended to mean they preferred alternative versions of the question that do clarify that the United Kingdom is a member of the European Union.

However, many participants tended to spontaneously suggest changes to the question to make current membership status clearer. The most frequent suggestions were around changing the phrase ‘should be a member’ to:

- Remain a member
- Continue to be a member
- Still be a member
- Stay a member

“I read it first and then read it again and I thought ‘should we remain a member of the EU’ would be more specific.” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Exeter)

“Maybe it should be do you think the UK should continue to be a member of the EU…” (Male, aged 25, mini-depth, Glasgow)

B) Views on individual words and phrasing

‘Do you think’

The phrase ‘Do you think’ was met with a mixed response. Those who preferred the phrase ‘Do you think’ noted that it sounded more personal, posing the question directly to the individual. These participants also felt that the phrase encouraged the voter to really consider their views and think carefully about their response. Younger people especially liked the use of this phrase in the question on the basis that it made them feel like their vote was important.

“I like ‘Do you think’ because it feel much more neutral [than ‘should’]… like it’s not just about staying or leaving but about what you think.” (Female, aged 20, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“[Do you think]… feels more personal and as if the person who wrote it wants your answer. ‘Should the’ feels more general.” (Female, aged 54, mini-depth, London)

Some participants spontaneously suggested that ‘Do you think’ be replaced with ‘Should’, although the majority decided on their preference when comparing the alternative questions (which introduced the term ‘Should’ in place of ‘Do you think’) to each other. Those who preferred the phrasing of ‘Should’ tended to do so because it felt more to the point and definite. This suggested to some that the word ‘Should’ inferred that the voting outcome was being taken more seriously by government. This view was voiced by those who felt that ‘Do you think’ sounded less concrete and aligned with an opinion poll aiming to simply understand public opinion rather than determining government policy and actions. Some participants who preferred ‘do you think’ also said that ‘should’ felt authoritative and directive suggesting that the word was dictating a certain response.
“The other thing [Q1] was asking ‘do you think’, you know, which is to you personally. This one [Q2] is maybe a bit more you know for the common good, it’s not asking you personally.” (Male, aged 54, in-depth interview, Glasgow)

“Do you think’ is wishy washy… it’s opinion rather than what should happen.” (Female, aged 60, mini-depth, Cardiff)

‘Should be a member’
The use of the phrase ‘should be a member’ in the question did raise some questions for a few participants. In these cases, the conditional nature of the word ‘should’ reinforced a perception that the referendum would be a ‘consultative exercise’ and that the outcome would not be binding on the Government.

A few participants also felt that the phrase ‘should be a member’ could potentially push some people towards a ‘yes’ vote because it felt like they were being told that they ‘should vote to be a member’. However, none of the participants were influenced in their own vote by this phrase so their perceptions only related to how they thought other people could potentially be influenced. Consequently, there was no evidence that this phrase led people to vote in a particular way.

‘Member’
For a few participants, the word ‘member’ triggered positive feelings associated with being part of ‘team’ or a ‘group’, which they thought could potentially lead people towards voting to stay a member.

“Well that actually says to me part of a team, you know, ‘Be’, ‘Be’ a member of, that’s what it says to me.” (Focus group participant, 60+, C2DE, Nottingham)

“Member does raise feelings about being part of a group – a team…I can’t decide if that would sway someone to vote to stay a member because of that though. It might.” (Male, aged 38, mini-depth, Cardiff)

In practice, the participants that were led by the use of ‘member’ were those who lacked any awareness of the European or had very limited knowledge about the European Union and the United Kingdom’s status within it. Amongst these few participants, the positive associations attached to the word ‘member’ made them feel like voting to ‘be a member’ was a good thing to do. Consequently, they were led to answer ‘yes’ to this question based on a positive association with the word ‘member’ as opposed to their own knowledge of the topic. However, it is pertinent to note that these participants also stated that they would be highly unlikely to vote in the referendum and that if they did decide to vote they would research the topic before doing so.

However, the majority of participants felt that the word ‘member’ in the context of the question was a neutral and factual description of the United Kingdom’s relationship with the European Union.
“It’s just telling you what it is. I don’t think its leading – how else would you describe what we are? We just are a member….” (Female, aged 61, mini-depth, Cardiff)

‘Union’
For a few participants the word ‘Union’ was also associated with being ‘part of something bigger’ or part of a ‘team’ which was perceived as being positive. Further, the word ‘Union’ used in conjunction with ‘member’ reinforced a feeling of being part of a community. Again, this was mainly problematic where the participant lacked any knowledge of the European Union and voted ‘yes’ because of the positive feelings they associated with the feeling of being part of a team.

‘United Kingdom’ and ‘European Union’
There were some queries regarding the definition of the United Kingdom from a couple of participants (who were unclear on which countries were included and the impact of possible Scottish Independence). There were also widespread queries regarding the definition of the European Union given that awareness and levels of knowledge regarding the European Union differed across participants with most understanding at a basic level what the European Union is, but seeking further clarification regarding the impact that membership has on the United Kingdom.

“Does it [United Kingdom] just stand for this country?” (Male, aged 37, mini-depth, Nottingham)

“What is the European Union?” (Female, aged 25, mini-depth, Belfast)

C) Views regarding neutrality
Although the majority of participants felt this question was potentially misleading, some felt that because it did not specifically discuss the United Kingdom’s current membership status, it was actually a fair and neutral way to ask the question. This tended to be based on the feeling that the words used in the alternative versions to clarify current member status (‘remain’, ‘continue’, and ‘leave’ etc.) could potentially lead people towards a specific answer option (see section 4.2 for more detail). Consequently, they felt that a question that did not include these words was the least biased. However, these participants were those who already clearly understood that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union.

“It’s probably a better question than using ‘continue’ or ‘remain’ because that’s already implying a ‘yes’ or a ‘no’.” (Male, aged 19, mini-depth, Nottingham)

“If you don’t include any descriptive wording then it’s more neutral isn’t it?” (Female, aged 58, mini-depth, Cardiff)
As noted above, a few participants felt that the phrase ‘should be a member’ could potentially be biased towards a ‘yes’ vote because it could be interpreted as them being told the United Kingdom ‘should be a member’. However, there was no evidence that, in practice, this phrase caused participants to vote against their intentions.

D) Suggested changes to the proposed referendum question

Many participants felt the question should clarify the United Kingdom’s current member status. Most felt that in its current form it is open to the mistaken interpretation that the United Kingdom is currently not a member of the European Union and the voter is being asked if they want the United Kingdom to become a member.

The most frequently suggested ways to clarify the United Kingdom’s current membership status were:

- To change ‘be a member’ to stay / remain / continue to ‘be a member’
  - ‘Stay’ was only ever a spontaneous suggestion whereas ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ were suggested both spontaneously and as a result of seeing the other versions of the question which contained these words (Q2, Q3 and / or Q4)

- To add ‘still’ in front of ‘be a member’
  
  “I mean I understood the question. The thing I put was should remain I kind of was the sort of additional element, because we are a member of the EU, should we remain with the EU?”  (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Exeter)

  “I just think it already is a member of the European Union so it should say continue to be rather than just insinuate it [that people know].”  (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, BC1C2, Leeds)

Overall, there was no clear preference for any one of the suggested changes over the other three. All of the suggested changes would make it clear that the United Kingdom is currently a member and so would remove the potential for misunderstanding. There was no evidence that any of these changes would cause participants to answer the question differently to how they intended.
**Summary box: the proposed referendum question (Question 1)**

*Positive elements:*
- Clear and simple language
- Perceived by some to be the most neutral because it relies on participants own knowledge of current membership status rather than informing them of it in the question
- For some ‘Do you think’ felt inclusive and personal to the reader

*Negative elements:*
- The phrase ‘be a member’ implies that the United Kingdom is currently not a member of the European Union which was found to mislead and confuse people with little to no awareness of the United Kingdom’s current status
- The majority of participants felt that the question should make clear the United Kingdom is currently a member
- Some felt ‘Do you think’ sound like an ‘opinion poll’ which could cause people to think the vote is not binding
4.2 Questions 2 & 3

Findings for Questions 2 & 3 are discussed together given the similarity of views towards them.

These questions were developed prior to fieldwork by the Electoral Commission to test alongside the proposed referendum question (Question 1). They were tested during the pilot phase and main stages of the research (the final phase of the research was dedicated to testing Questions 4, 5 and 6 only). The focus group discussions all tested the proposed referendum question (question 1) first, then Questions 2 & 3 were used as comparator questions to drive debate. They were fully rotated across the in-depth and mini-depth interviews.

A) Understanding of the question

Overall participants agreed that both Questions 2 and 3 were short and concise making them easy to read. The language used within the questions was considered to be straightforward, simple, and plain English. For this reason, many liked these questions and felt that they clearly conveyed the question.

“...this is a lot easier to answer because it sort of explains that we’re already in the EU and asks if we should stay.” (Female, aged 19, mini-depth, Colwyn Bay)

“This one is more direct, because ‘should’ comes first.” (Male, aged 67, mini-depth, Aberdeen)

These questions were further benefited by the inclusion of the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’, which clarified that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union. Participants agreed that it was important to clarify this fact with voters and those who themselves had been unsure about United Kingdom membership were particularly keen to note the importance of this. These views were strengthened when Questions 2 and 3 were compared to the proposed referendum question (Question 1), which was seen as lacking contextual information regarding the United Kingdom’s current membership of the European Union.
“This question [Q2] makes it clear that we are already in there [the EU]. That one [Q1] asks whether we should be. This one [Q2] is the best one for now. I would use this one [Q1] to ask people if they wanted to join Europe.” (Male, aged 60, in-depth interview, Aberystwyth)

Participants across the research were clear that this question was asking whether they thought the United Kingdom should stay a member of the European Union or leave the European Union; they were confident that they understood this question and would vote in the way they wanted to.

“I do understand it…the question is very clear to understand.”
(Female, aged 33, mini-depth, Aberdeen)

B) Views on individual words and phrasing

‘Remain’
There was no evidence that the word ‘remain’ was difficult to understand. It was generally felt to be simple and clear. Participants felt that in the context of the question ‘remain’ made it clear that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union, which they agreed was an important and necessary clarification to include. It was felt to be a ‘solid’ word that gave rise to feelings of ‘standing still’ which was felt to fairly represent the perceived outcome of voting would be i.e. that remaining a member would mean that the current situation ‘stands still’ or, conversely, that not remaining a member means change would occur (see section 7.1 for more information regarding assumptions related to the outcomes of voting).

“I didn’t have a problem with the word remain… I suppose ‘remain’ comes across as a wee bit stronger word than ‘continue’. It sounds like [we will remain] forever.” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, BC1C2, Belfast)

For a few, the word ‘remain’ was considered old-fashioned and not everyday language. Whilst these few participants expressed concern that not everyone would recognise or understand the word, there were no participants across the research that highlighted the word as being personally problematic. This was true of people with English as a second language and those with low literacy levels.

‘Continue’
The word ‘continue’ was also easily understood and felt to be clear and simple. However, some participants associated ‘continue’ with being an ‘on-going journey’, which they felt could affect the neutrality of the question. A few participants felt that it was a more commonly used word than ‘remain’ so preferred it for this reason. It did not affect their understanding of the question.

“To be continued’. It can mean that anything can happen. If it said ‘this will remain’ then you think right well it’s just going to be that forever.” (Focus group participant aged 25-44 years, BC1C2, Glasgow)
There was much debate across the research regarding the use of the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’. Those who saw Question 2 first often spontaneously suggested that ‘remain’ could be replaced with ‘continue’ and those who saw Question 3 first equally suggested replacing ‘continue’ with ‘remain’. Overall, there was no clear preference for either term and, crucially, it was clear that regardless of which word was used there was no impact on an individual’s interpretation of the question or their voting behaviour; participants did not change how they had voted between Questions 2 and 3.

‘Stay’ was suggested by a few participants as being a possible alternative to ‘remain’ or ‘continue’, as it might be seen as a ‘simpler’ word. However, this suggestion did not come out strongly as the majority were happy to use ‘remain’ or ‘continue’. Amongst those who had suggested ‘stay’, they were equally happy to use ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ as all these words were interpreted in a highly similar way. Their use did not affect how participants understood the questions or the way they voted.

“This [question] implies there’ll be an action afterwards depending on what the outcome was…the word remain…makes it feel like there could possibly be something happening where we won’t remain.” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, BC1C2, Leeds)

‘Should’
The debate regarding individual preference for ‘Should’ over ‘Do you think’ is discussed in more detail in section 4.1. In summary, some participants preferred the use of ‘Should’ because it felt more decisive and binding than ‘Do you think’ which felt to some like an ‘opinion poll’ as opposed to a serious referendum question. Although there was no consensus regarding the exact response that the word ‘Should’ suggested, it was clear that when compared to ‘Do you think’, some felt that it was a strong and commanding use of language.

“…the word ‘should’ is kind of like strong so may be it should be ‘do you think’, so it’s more personal in that way?” (Female, aged 24, in-depth interview, Nottingham, Learning Difficulties)

“I think that ‘do you think’ or ‘should’ we are talking about a nuance, that is as important as which shade of blue you like, the dark blue or the slightly less dark blue.” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Exeter)

Again, using either of these phrases did not affect the way in which participants voted.

C) Views regarding neutrality

When thinking about the neutrality of the question some participants raised concerns regarding the inclusion of the word ‘remain’ or ‘continue’. Whilst it was agreed that these words were necessary to inform the voter that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union, they also reflected that they could potentially introduce some bias to the questions.
Some participants expressed a concern that the knowledge that the United Kingdom is a member of European Union could imply that the question posed is asking about maintaining the membership 'status quo'. Whilst they agreed that this did not affect personal understanding or voting preference, it did result in participants querying whether this could potentially lead to certain views or assumptions on the part of the voter:

- That maintaining the status quo will be interpreted in a positive light; maintaining a 'solid' situation.
- That maintaining the status quo will be interpreted in a negative light; maintaining a 'stagnant' situation.
- That the status quo infers that terms of the United Kingdom membership of the European Union will be the same as they currently are.

“[Remain is] saying ‘don’t leave’ – it makes [leaving] sound like a worse option.” (Male, aged 29, mini-depth, Leeds)

“’Remain’ sounds like you are hanging onto something, whereas you are sort of staying where you are.” (Focus group participants, aged 45-59, C2DE, Exeter)

However, despite these comments, it was clear that participants had understood the question and voted in the way they wanted to. There was no evidence that either of these words biased participant's votes in a particular way. It was also clear that perceptions of bias were not strong and most participants felt 'remain' and 'continue' were plain, common, and ordinary words that did not affect how they chose to answer the question.

Another point raised on the issue of neutrality was the structure of the question. Some participants noted that the question was structured to ask voters whether they thought the United Kingdom should remain/continue to be a member of the European Union rather than ask whether the United Kingdom should leave the European Union. Whilst participants did not feel that this had an impact on their vote, they felt that it was not an entirely neutral way to ask the question.

Some were interested in the idea of reversing the question and asking about the United Kingdom leaving the European Union and suggested this as a potential alternative question. However, many thought this could also be interpreted as being biased although they would still answer the question in the same way. This suggestion was subsequently tested in the final phase of fieldwork to explore whether it affected peoples voting preferences, which it did not. Please see section 4.5 below for feedback on this question.

“[It] doesn’t ask you what you think in the question. [It] just says ‘should remain’ [which is] more pushing towards the ‘yes’.” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, C2DE, Omagh)
D) Suggested changes to Questions 2 & 3

The main suggestions for improvements to this question focused around suggestions for making the question more balanced by incorporating both options into the question wording. In a few instances, participants spontaneously mentioned similar wording to that used in Question 4 as this appeared to feel a natural way to make the question feel more neutral; giving people an option of whether to remain or leave the EU, rather than a Yes/No vote.

Other suggestions also focused on providing two options e.g. Adding 'or not' to the end of the questions to make it feel more like the voter has two options to choose from. For example; ‘Should the United Kingdom remain a member / continue to be a member of the European Union or not?’

A few participants suggested reversing the phrasing and asking a question similar to that of Question 6, although many thought that this would suffer from a lack of neutrality.

Summary box: Questions 2 & 3

Positive elements:
- They are short, clear, concise and easy to read
- They both clarify that the United Kingdom is currently a member and so are felt to be less open to misinterpretation
- ‘Remain’ and ‘continue’ were both felt to be equally clear and simple
- For some, the word ‘Should’ feels more decisive and authoritative which made participants feel like an action would result from the outcome

Negative elements:
- Some felt that ‘Should’ was too authoritative and so preferred ‘Do you think’
- The words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ could possibly bias people towards voting to maintain the status quo although there was no evidence that this was the case for any of the participants in the research
4.3 Question 4

Question 4 was developed iteratively using feedback from the initial research sessions and responses from the Electoral Commission’s stakeholder consultation. It was tested in main stage 2 and the final stage of fieldwork.

A) Understanding of the question

Many participants liked Question 4, typically because of the perceived neutrality it offers (see next section) but also because they felt it was a well-worded question that was easy to understand.

“I prefer this one [Q4]. It’s more balanced and fair. It’s shorter than [Q5] and more to the point then [Q5] but it has the same result so it’s a better question.” (Female, aged 77, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“It’s just ‘remain’ do you want to stay or ‘leave’ do you want to go…it’s very simple. What else could it possibly be asking?” (Female, aged 49, mini-depth, Nottingham)

Although a number of participants preferred Question 4, where it was criticised tended to be on the basis that it is wordier and more long-winded than the other more concise questions. Some participants raised this but it was often only mentioned when the question was compared to the other questions. The wordier nature of the question was off-putting for some participants especially those with low literacy or English as a second language who were more likely to re-read the question before answering it to ensure they had correctly interpreted it. However, no-one answered this question differently from the way they intended and it was still felt to be simple enough that everyone could understand it.

“Some people may get confused with this question.” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, C2DE, Merthyr Tydfil)

“You will get people that aren’t very good with forms so a ‘yes’ and ‘no’ will be easier.” (Male, aged 66, mini-depth, low literacy, Exeter)

Some also felt that the question was repetitive, as the options are presented within the wording of the question and in the response options. To some extent, the perception of the question as overly wordy was possibly a research effect in that it feels longer in comparison to the other questions but a few participants did mention this spontaneously upon their initial reading of the question. However, participants who made these points did not think that this affected the clarity of the question, and they were still able to answer it in the way they intended. In this sense, the criticisms
were not strongly made, and it would not impede people in responding correctly to the question.

“The first question was a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ but this question is too long and I lost interest.” (Focus group participant, aged 25-44, C2DE, Colwyn Bay)

There was no clear preference for the answer options in Question 4 compared to the ‘yes’ and ‘no’ answer options in the other versions. Some participants preferred ‘yes’ and ‘no’ because they were simpler, whereas others preferred the options in Question 4 because they felt it was useful to reiterate the answer options, making it clearer what the two choices were. It is important to note that the answer options did not affect people’s voting behaviour.

B) Views regarding neutrality

Question 4 was thought to be the most neutral as it seems to provide an equal treatment of both voting options, describing both scenarios fully in the wording of the question and the response options. This was thought to be more neutral than the alternative ‘yes’ or ‘no’ answer structure used in the other questions where only one scenario is described, and voters are given the option to answer ‘yes’ or ‘no’. Participants thought that by describing both scenarios fully, the question did not seem to place a value on either scenario, but instead provided equal weight to two alternatives.

“This is what I want [in terms of a balanced question]…It gives you the parameters of what you are being asked and then asks you to choose either A or B.” (Male, aged 44, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“…this is the perfect question… all of the options are there.” (Female, aged 43, in-depth interview, London, Learning difficulty)

Concerns expressed around the words ‘remain’ and ‘leave’ when presented in the context of other questions were diminished for Question 4. Although these issues were raised in relation to Question 4, in particular the negative and harsh connotations of the word ‘leave’ (see the consideration of Question 6 for full details on this), the effect was reduced through balancing this with an alternative option in the question wording. As both words were included, it was clear that two equal and opposite concepts were being given the same weight, balancing each other out and alleviating any concerns about their neutrality. The wording of Question 4 therefore did not appear to lead people to answer the question in any particular way.

“It’s a better question – without the word ‘remain’ as well [as in Q6] then it’s just leading.” (Male, 52, mini-depth, Cardiff)

Although some had reservations about the length of the question wording, it was thought to be the most neutral and fair amongst the available options because it appeared to resolve concerns around the neutrality of words such as ‘leave’ and ‘remain’, by presenting both alternatives within the question and response options.
“It is not leading, it just wants you to decide one way or the other.”
(Female, aged 61, in-depth interview, Cardiff, English as a second language)

C) Views towards outcome options

That the response options included a scenario rather than ‘yes’ or ‘no’ options was felt to improve the clarity of the question. This seemed to provide completeness to each option, allowing the voter to feel sure of the meaning of each option. Some also suggested that presenting a scenario response rather than a ‘yes’ or ‘no’ response might have the effect of engaging people to consider the meaning of the choice to remain or leave, and where yes or no options could encourage a more flippant, less considered response.

“The outcomes are clear; they reinforce what the question is asking you. I think it’s very clear.” (Female, aged 67, mini-depth, London)

Conversely, some felt that setting out the scenarios in the response options meant that they needed to be read carefully, and sometimes re-read. Whilst participants found it difficult to determine why this was, a couple suggested that it was simply due to there being more words in the answer options when compared to the other questions. Although this could have the effect of engaging people in considering their answer, it was also thought by some to make the question more onerous, where a simple ‘yes’ or ‘no’ would be easier to read.

D) Suggested changes to Question 4

Some suggestions were made for refinements to Question 4, which could address the repetition and length of the response options. It was suggested that instead of repeating the words ‘European Union’, the abbreviation ‘EU’ could be used on the second mention, and also in the response options. This would shorten the question overall and help make it less ‘wordy’, as well as reducing the repetition.

The only other key refinement was to cut off the ‘or leave the European Union’ from the end of the sentence which would essentially turn Question 4 into Question 2. Overall, these suggestions were not frequently made, and many were happy with the question as it is.

There was also a suggestion by a few that the words ‘Do you think’, which were liked in Question 5, could be incorporated into Question 4. This phrase helped some to feel that they were being consulted, and their opinion was being sought. However, this appeared to be attributable mainly to personal preference, and unlikely to have an impact on how the question would be answered.

Overall, many of the participants expressed a preference for Question 4 over Question 5 and 6 which they felt were potentially misleading and overly biased respectively.
Summary box: Question 4

**Positive elements:**
- For most the question was straightforward and the meaning was clear
- Most of the participants who saw this question felt it was the most neutral, even those who preferred an alternative version, because it incorporates both the ‘remain’ and ‘leave’ options into the question wording
- Overall, this question was perceived to be the most balanced

**Negative elements:**
- Some participants felt that the question was overly wordy and could be confusing. Indeed, some participants with English as a second language or literacy difficulties re-read the question to ensure that they had interpreted it correctly (but no-one answered differently to how they intended)
4.4 Question 5

Question 5 was developed by the Electoral Commission following the second stage of fieldwork. The wording is based on the proposed referendum question (Question 1) with an additional line at the outset, which clarifies that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union.

The additional sentence was added as a preamble to the question on the basis of feedback for the proposed referendum question, which called for clarification on current membership status.

As Question 5 was developed following the second part of the main stage of fieldwork, it was only tested during the final stage of fieldwork. This meant that it was tested with 10 x in-depth interviews and 20 x mini-depth participants.

Please note that a large amount of the feedback for the actual question (as opposed to the preamble) was the same as for the proposed referendum question (Question 1) which is detailed as section 4.1

A) Understanding of the question

Participants felt that Question 5 used clear and simple language and was easy to understand. The majority of participants said that the preamble about the United Kingdom’s current membership was important. Many felt it was a useful clarification for people who may not be clear about the current membership status. A number of participants who preferred alternative versions of the question suggested that this phrase would be a useful addition to the other versions to ensure that there would be no confusion about current membership status.

“It’s [the preamble] saying to the reader what the state of the UK is in relation to the EU.” (Female, aged 67, mini-depth, London)

However, some participants felt that Question 5 contradicted itself because, even though the preamble says the United Kingdom is a member of the European Union, the phrase ‘be a member’ in the question wording still implies that the United Kingdom is currently not a member. Similarly to the proposed referendum question (Question 1), participants suggested changing the question element to make current membership status clearer and to fit more easily with the initial clarifying statement.

“Should be a member’…yes [we should be] even though it is? We are already a member, why then ask if we should be?” (Male, age 56, mini-depth, London, English as a second language)
“Why say ‘should’ [be a member]? Why not just say ‘remain’?” (Male, aged 38, mini-depth, London)

Whilst the addition of the preamble in Question 5 overcame the problem of misinterpretation found with the proposed referendum question (Question 1), the perceived contradiction was confusing for some participants who were unsure what they were being asked to vote on. This confusion was typically experienced by people unaware of, or with low knowledge of, the United Kingdom’s current membership status. This made it difficult for them to feel confident about the answer they gave to the question.

However, not all participants felt the preamble was necessary. A few suggested that the phrase ‘should be a member’ could be altered to make it clear in the question itself that the United Kingdom is currently a member e.g. by changing it to ‘remain a member’ or ‘continue to be a member’. A few felt that making this change would remove the need for the preamble as the question would then be clear that the United Kingdom currently is a member. The feedback was similar to that for the proposed referendum question in this respect. However, this was a minority view and most liked the additional preamble and felt it was important to keep.

“You could just say ‘still be a member’ in the question and it would rationalise that question as you wouldn’t need the statement at the beginning then.” (Male, aged 27, mini-depth, London)

Overall, many participants expressed a preference for this version of the question compared to Questions 4 or 6 (which were the other versions they were shown). This preference tended to be driven by:

- The inclusion of the clarifying statement.
- The perception that Question 4 was potentially overly wordy (it should be noted that this was only raised by a small number of participants as rationale for preferring question 5 when directly comparing both questions).
- The perceived bias of Question 6 (see section 4.5).

However, some caveated this preference for Question 5 with a desire for clarification to be made to the question element as in section C below.

B) Views regarding neutrality

Similarly to Question 1, some participants felt that Question 5 was the most neutral way of presenting the question because it removed the need to use potentially leading words like ‘remain’, ‘continue’ or ‘leave’.

The clarifying statement was also felt to be neutral and not leading. Most felt it was a ‘fair and accurate’ description of the United Kingdom’s relationship with the European Union and that it would be difficult to describe it using alternative terminology.
“I mean, you could just say like ‘continue to be a member’ so you don’t need the statement as you know it already is a member. But then ‘continue’ might be more leading for some people than ‘should be a member’. So, no, I think it’s fine as it is. I prefer this question.”
(Male, aged 66, mini-depth, Cardiff)

C) Suggested changes to Question 5

Despite the addition of the explanatory statement clarifying the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union, some participants felt that the wording of the question could still confuse or mislead people.

Suggested changes were the same as those discussed for the proposed referendum question (Question 1):

- To change ‘be a member’ to stay / remain / continue to ‘be a member’
  - ‘Remain’ and ‘continue’ were suggested both spontaneously and as a result of seeing the other versions of the question
- To add ‘still’ in front of ‘be a member’

Some participants thought that making this change to the wording of the actual question would then negate the need for the explanatory statement because it would be clear from the wording that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union.

Again, there was little difference in preference for which wording was actually used as they were all interpreted to have similar meanings by participants and so would not affect voting preference.

Summary box: Question 5

Positive elements:
- The question was simple and easy to understand in terms of the actual language used
- The statement clarifying current membership was felt to be very useful and important
- Similarly to the proposed referendum question (Question 1) question 1, some felt that not including words like ‘remain’ or ‘continue’ in the actual question wording was a neutral way of presenting the wording

Negative elements:
- Some participants felt that the clarifying statement and the subsequent question potentially contradicted each other because the statement says the United Kingdom is a member but then the question can be interpreted as asking whether the voter wants the United Kingdom to become a member which caused confusion for some and is open to misinterpretation
4.5 Question 6

Question 6 was developed following the second stage of fieldwork. It follows a similar formula to Questions 2 and 3 but works in the reverse.

The question was developed for the final stage of fieldwork so was not tested in any focus group discussions. It was tested with the 10 x in-depth and 20 x mini-depth interview participants.

A) Understanding of the question

Participants found Question 6 to be a simple, clear and concise question. Most felt this was the question that worked best in terms of being ‘to the point’ and ‘easy to answer’.

“It was just simple – ‘yes’ or ‘no’ do I want to leave?” (Female, aged 18, mini-depth, Cardiff)

A small number of participants had spontaneously noted that this was a possible question format in earlier stages of the fieldwork as an alternative wording option following sight of Questions 2 and 3. However, most tended to then consider that it could also suffer from potential problems of bias due to the focus on leaving, in a similar way that Questions 2 & 3 possibly could be biased towards ‘remaining’ or ‘continuing to be’ a member.

The few participants who expressed a liking for Question 6 tended to be those with English as a second language and people with lower levels of literacy because they felt it was most direct and to the point question, and therefore the easiest to answer.

B) Views regarding neutrality

The key concern raised by most participants who saw Question 6 was that they felt it lacked neutrality and balance caused by the inclusion of the word ‘leave’. Most of these participants felt that the word ‘leave’ had a ‘strong’ and negative presence in the question. It is important to note that:

- Views of ‘leave’ as having a strong presence in the question were similar regardless of voting preference.
- The perceived bias towards leaving in Question 6 was much stronger than was the case for ‘remaining’ or ‘continuing’ in Questions 2 & 3.

Many felt that the word ‘leave’ was leading because the question offered no alternative option. Although this was caused in some cases by having seen Question 4 first, it was also raised spontaneously by participants who had not seen any alternative wording. There was a strong perception that the question was inviting the reader to agree to ‘leave’.
“I’m going to answer the same but you’ve only got the one term! Better to have the two options.” (Male, aged 28, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“The question supposes that the debate is only about leaving and not staying or leaving.” (Female, aged 67, mini-depth, London)

“I feel this question [Q6] would maybe appeal to Euro-sceptics because it really seems to want you to say ‘yes’...it feels like it’s saying leaving would be a good idea”. (Male, aged 52, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“...But it’s not a matter of staying in, it’s just about leaving?” (Female, aged 20, mini-depth, Cardiff)

Some participants did associate the word ‘leave’ with anti-EU campaigning in the media because this campaign is focused on the United Kingdom ‘leaving’ the European Union. They thought this could push people to vote to ‘leave’ because using it in the question could trigger the association with the leave campaign.

“The media always talks about ‘leaving’ so people might link it to this and vote to leave.” (Male, aged 38, mini-depth, London)

For some, the word ‘should’ at the outset of the sentence felt like the question wanted them to vote to ‘leave’ because they felt ‘should’ was an authoritative word and that it acted in combination with the word ‘leave’ to make the voter feel they should choose to leave.

Overall, there was a sense that only having the word ‘leave’ in the question was potentially biased because it did not offer an alternative option and so many people felt like they were being asked to agree to leave. This came out more strongly for Question 6 than Questions 2 & 3 because participants felt that the word ‘leave’ elicits stronger feelings from people than ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ do.

“It’s putting ideas of ‘leave’ in your head.” (Male, aged 57, in-depth interview, London)

A few participants raised an issue around having to answer ‘no’ in order to remain a member of the European Union. These participants felt it was more natural to answer ‘yes’ to remain a member, rather than ‘yes’ to leave. However, there was potentially an element of research bias introduced whereby participants were comparing Question 6 to other questions that required them to choose the opposite answer option in order to answer in the same way meaning they needed to re-read the question to make sure they had given the right answer. However, this was only mentioned in a few cases.

It should be noted that we did not find any evidence that the participants we spoke to answered this question differently from the way they intended. The attitudes expressed around bias and neutrality were thought to be potentially problematic for ‘others’ and not the participants themselves. Some participants were more hesitant about answering Question 6 but this typically stemmed from having seen Questions 4 or 5 first, which required them to choose the opposite answer option in order to
vote the same way as they previously had. The main impact was that they had to re-read the question at least twice to ensure they have interpreted it correctly.

It is also important to note that some participants did not agree that 'leave' was biased. They felt it was straightforward and simple, as well as being clear about what their vote in either direction would mean. However, these participants were in the minority.

Overall, the majority of participants expressed dislike for this question, including those participants who wanted to vote to leave the European Union, because of a perceived lack of neutrality.

C) Suggested changes to Question 6

The key suggestions focused on rephrasing the question to make it much more balanced. The main suggestions focused on phrasing similar to Question 4 i.e. wording that offered both choices within the question as this was felt to be a fairer way of asking the question. In some cases this was a prompted response after seeing alternative versions, but some participants, like the man below, suggested this spontaneously after only seeing Question 6.

"With regards to membership of the EU, should we...then have ‘remain’ and ‘leave’ as the answer options. It’s not at all balanced at the moment." (Male, aged 44, mini-depth, Cardiff)

However, a few participants did discuss rephrasing it in a similar way to Questions 2 and 3 i.e. reversing the phrasing to ask whether the United Kingdom should ‘remain’, ‘stay’, or ‘continue’ to be member rather than ‘leave’.

Summary box: Question 6

Positive elements:

- The question is liked for being short, simple and concise – especially amongst people with English as a second language and those with low literacy levels who found it easier to read because it is short and to the point

Negative elements:

- The wording is seen as being unfairly balanced because it emphasises the word ‘leave’ in the question and is therefore potentially biased.
5 Welsh language questions

The findings for the Welsh language tend to reflect the English versions but we have highlighted below where issues specific to the Welsh versions arise.

5.1 Welsh language: Proposed referendum question (Question 1)

Overall participants considered this a balanced question that was easy to understand. However, some did misinterpret this question and considered it to be asking whether the United Kingdom should join the European Union.

These participants tended to either be unsure of the current situation or had interpreted the question as being about further European integration.

‘Undeb Ewropeaidd’

One possible interpretative issue with the wording was caused by the Welsh for ‘Undeb Ewropeaidd’, which was not felt to be a particularly common phrase. One participant initially thought this phrase meant ‘United Nations’ and only understood the correct meaning once he had seen the English version.

“I think some people might not quite know what they are voting for with this [Q1]. I’m sure everyone should know that we are a member but, you know how people are these days, especially younger people voting for the first time or older people who just need something to remind them that we are in the Union.” (Female, 45-59, Depth interview, Welsh language)

“This question [Q2] makes it clear that we are already in there [the EU]. That one [Q1] asks whether we should be. This one [Q2] is the best one for now. I would use this one [Q1] to ask people if they wanted to join Europe.” (Male, 60+, Retired, Depth interview, Welsh language)

“It goes straight to the point doesn’t it?”

“It doesn’t take long to read it”

“Not everyone understands that we are in Europe already”

(Focus group participants, 25-44 years, C2DE, Welsh language)

It should be noted that despite the potential concern regarding the word ‘Undeb Ewropeaidd’, participants did not suggest a better alternative.
5.2 Welsh language: Question 2
Participants tended to describe this question as clear, direct and easy to understand. Overall, participants considered it a balanced question.

“This is more accurate because the wording ‘ddal i fod’ reflects that we are already members of the EU.” (Focus group participant, 45-59 years, BC1C2, Welsh language)

“I don’t think it really steers you one way or the other – it just provides more information on the current situation [than Q1].” (Focus group participant, 45-59 years, BC1C2, Welsh language)

However, several noted that it felt less neutral than the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and Questions 4 and 5 when asked to compare them, although there was little evidence that this was leading participants themselves to vote in a particular way.

“If people were unsure then they might vote yes to remain as we are. But I don’t see a problem really, that’s a fact.” (Female, 45-59, Depth interview, Welsh language)

5.3 Welsh language: Question 3
When asked to choose between Questions 2 and 3, the majority of Welsh-speaking participants preferred the wording ‘ddal/dal’ (remain) to ‘bara’ or ‘barhau’ (continue).

“In the Welsh, I think ‘ddal i fod’ (remain) is better but in English I’d prefer ‘continue’ because it’s a bit simpler.” (Female, 45-59, Depth interview, Welsh language)

“I think ‘ddal i fod’ is simpler for younger voters or for those who are less fluent [in Welsh]. There’s less scope for misunderstanding with ‘ddal i fod’.” (Focus group participant, 45-59 years, BC1C2, Welsh language)

Several participants noted that they would prefer the word ‘barhau’ to the word ‘bara’ if the word ‘continue’ were chosen in English.
“I don’t like the wording of this… ‘bara i fod’… not sure about that… ‘A ddylai’r Deyrnas barhau i fod’… ‘is better.’” (Male, 60+, Retired, Depth interview, Welsh language)

“The word ‘bara’ feels less formal to me. I would expect to see the word ‘barhau’ used on an official document like this.” (Focus group participant, 45-59 years, BC1C2, Welsh language)

5.4 Welsh language: Question 4

Welsh speaking participants considered question 4 to be balanced and neutral although some noted that they had to read the question in more detail than others (e.g. the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and 5). Participants noted that Question 4 provided more information but also noted that it could be confusing for some people as it provided more information to read. Those who preferred Question 4 noted that it provided ‘more information’ and was ‘more balanced’ as it provided the two options.

“This question tells me that we are still in the EU.”

“In the second question it is clear that you have a choice but there isn't a clear choice in the first one.”

(Focus group participants, 25-44 years, C2DE, Welsh language)

Some participants considered Question 4 to be too long.

“The first question [Q1] was a simple yes or no but this question is too long and I lost interest.”

“The answers are quite long but I would choose this question.”

(Focus group participants, 25-44 years, C2DE, Welsh language)

The repetition of ‘Undeb Ewropeaidd’ was also potentially confusing and participants suggested abbreviating this to ‘EU’ on the second mention and in the response options. This would help to shorten the question and make it less ‘wordy’.
5.5 Welsh language: Question 5

The two Welsh speaking participants who reviewed this question considered it to be balanced and neutral. It was considered to be easy to understand and straightforward.

“If you understand what you are doing then 5 is easier; but if not, then 4 is easier”. (Male, 17-24, Depth interview, Welsh language)

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<th>PAPUR PLEIDLEISIO</th>
<th>BALLOT PAPER</th>
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<td>Vote (X) ONLY ONCE</td>
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<td>The United Kingdom is a member of the European Union.</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ydych chi’n meddwl y dyla’r Deyrnas Unedig fod yn aelod o’r Undeb Ewropaidd?</td>
<td>Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?</td>
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YDW YES

NAC YGWNO

5.6 Welsh language: Question 6

Both Welsh speaking participants who reviewed question 6 considered it to be less balanced than questions 4 and 5. One participant noted that she considered it to be a negative question and another noted that it could be confusing for some participants as it presented a ‘double negative.’

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<th>PAPUR PLEIDLEISIO</th>
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<td>Vote (X) ONLY ONCE</td>
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<tr>
<td>A ddyla’r Deyrnas Unedig adael yr Undeb Ewropaidd?</td>
<td>Should the United Kingdom leave the European Union?</td>
</tr>
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DYLAI YES

NA DDYLAI NO
6 Overall fit with assessment guidelines

The Electoral Commission question assessment guidelines are as follows.

The question should:
- Be easy to understand
- Be to the point
- Be unambiguous
- Avoid encouraging voters to consider one response more favourably than another
- Avoid misleading voters

A) Easy to understand

Overall, most participants found the language used in the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and the alternative versions easy to understand. Participants noted that the language used was simple and in plain English, and it was clear that the wording and phrasing of the questions presented very little difficulty for most participants. This included those for who English is a second language and people with low levels of literacy or learning difficulties.

A few participants re-read Question 4 to make sure they had interpreted it correctly noting some concerns that it was overly wordy and potentially confusing. However, none of the participants answered this differently to the way they intended.

Less easy to understand for the majority of participants was the implications that their vote will have. A lack of contextual knowledge and understanding of the topic area meant most would require a lot more information before they would feel able to confidently cast their vote either way.

The proposed referendum question (Question 1), and to a lesser extent Question 5, were less easy to understand for some participants based on their contextual knowledge of membership status. This lack of contextual knowledge meant some participants incorrectly interpreted the phrase ‘be a member’ to mean that they were being asked if the United Kingdom should become a member of the European Union, as opposed to whether membership should continue.

“Have I misinterpreted this?.. So do you think the UK should be a member of the European Union?

...Are you aware that we are currently a member of the European Union?

I don't know anything about it.” (Focus group participant aged 25-44 years, BC1C2, Glasgow)

These questions were felt to be misleading because they do not make it clear that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union.
Overall, Questions 2, 3, 4 and 6 were felt by most to be the clearest and easiest to understand.

B) To the point
All six questions were felt to be straightforward and to the point.

The only possible exception to this was Question 4 which some participants, especially those with English as a second language or literacy difficulties, felt was slightly long winded and potentially confusing. These participants were most likely to re-read the question. However, none of the participants answered this question differently to the way they intended.

C) Be unambiguous
The main concerns around ambiguity related to specific question wording in the proposed referendum question (Question 1) and Question 5. This was based on the ambiguity of the phrase ‘be a member’, which some participants felt did not make clear whether the United Kingdom is a current member of the European Union.

A key concern relating to all the questions, including the proposed referendum question, was that the majority of participants felt that the questions were possibly ambiguous about what the outcome of a majority vote in either direction would mean. Consequently, many were left feeling under confident about the vote they had cast. They tended to feel that they would require a lot more clarity about the outcomes before they would happy casting a vote in an official referendum.

D) Avoid encouraging voters to consider one response more favourably than another
Many participants discussed the potential for certain words and phrasing in the questions to be leading but, overall, there was little evidence that these concerns were borne out in reality.

Questions 2, 3 and 6 were all felt to have the potential to be leading because they emphasised only one side of the vote in the question wording. This was especially the case with Question 6 which participants felt was very leading due to the emphasis on the word ‘leave’ which did not come out as strongly as for the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’.

The main times participants were drawn to one answer response over another was when they lacked any contextual knowledge or understanding of the European Union. Where participants lacked any knowledge at all, they were more likely to vote to maintain what they interpreted from the question wording to be the status quo because they had no understanding of what the potential changes associated with voting for the alternative would mean.

Overall, Question 4 was felt to be the most neutral wording because it incorporated both choices into the wording.

E) Avoid misleading voters
As detailed in Section A above, the proposed referendum question (Question 1), and to a lesser extent Question 5, misled and / or caused confusion for some
participants. The phrase ‘be a member’ led participants with little to no awareness of the United Kingdom’s current membership status, to misunderstand the question and think the vote was about whether to become a member or not, rather than about remaining a member or not.

However, for the majority of participants who were aware that the United Kingdom is currently a member, the question was simple to answer and caused no difficulties although many felt that it could possibly be misleading to others.

In some cases these participants answered the proposed referendum question (Question 1) in a different way to how they answered other versions of the question. This was typically because their lack of knowledge led to them voting to maintain the status quo. In the proposed referendum question (Question 1), and to some extent Question 5, the status quo is interpreted as the United Kingdom not currently being a member whereas in the other versions it is interpreted as being a member.
7 Information provision

7.1 Assumptions brought to the interpretation of the question

Participants’ lack of knowledge about the European Union and the current debate around membership meant that they tended to vote upon the little knowledge they did hold. This meant that they (unconsciously) tended to make assumptions about what they were voting on. These assumptions related not only to the outcomes of the referendum but also about the nature of the referendum itself.

7.1.1 Referendum outcomes

“If they did do this question for the whole of Britain they would have to do at least basic background so that people know what it actually is or at least some understanding of the outcome.” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, BC1C2, Leeds)

Maintaining the status quo

Overall, most participants assumed that a vote to remain a member would mean that nothing would change and the situation would stay as it currently is.

“Nothing would happen [in majority ‘yes’ outcome] – it would stay as it is… We’d stay a member.” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Belfast)

A consequence of this assumption is that if a vote to remain a member in a future referendum is based upon a different form of membership then this is not clear from the current wording of any of the questions. There was a clear desire for further information about what the terms of membership would be in the future if different from the current time.

“I would never vote for us to join the Euro but I would be in favour of us staying in the European Union. I think some people will find it difficult to separate the two [European Union and Euro currency] and that could cause some confusion for people but then it would be for people to go and research the background for themselves.” (Female, aged 17-24, BC1C2, Leeds)

Further integration

A few participants thought that voting to stay a member would mean further integration of the United Kingdom into the European Union, and specifically that the United Kingdom would join the Euro currency. This view typically stemmed from a lack of knowledge meaning the participant did not understand the difference between the European Union and the Euro. Others assumed that if we remained a member then we would, at some point in the future, have to accept the Euro currency. This perception was stronger in Northern Ireland than in other areas, which was likely driven by the fact that the Euro has a stronger presence given that it is the currency of the Republic of Ireland.
“People might read that [Q1] and think does that mean that we have got to take on the Euro, get rid of our currency, become fully integrated into Europe? Or does it mean that we stay as we are?”
(Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Exeter)

“I don’t think that it’s the question that is the problem, I think it’s like everything else; it is getting the people to understand that there is a difference between the European Union and European Monetary.”
(Focus group participant, aged 45-59, BC1C2, Belfast)

**Total separation**

The majority of participants assumed that voting against continued membership would mean the United Kingdom would no longer be a member of the European Union and would operate totally separately from it. This appeared to be driven by the participant’s assumption that they were being asked a simple ‘in or out’ question. In some cases, the assumption of ‘total separation’ appeared to be based around knowledge picked up from the media associated with the arguments in favour of ‘leaving’.

**Revised membership**

A few participants thought that a vote to no longer be a member would actually mean a revised type of membership rather than total separation. Reasons for this assumption included:

- Information in news media referring to potential re-negotiation of the current terms of membership
- The belief, amongst more knowledgeable participants, that if the United Kingdom left the European Union, it would still be a part of the Common Market or that the relationship would be similar to that of Norway or Switzerland, which these participants knew were not members of the European Union. Although they did not tend to understand exactly what relationship either of these countries does have with the European Union⁶, they had more of an awareness that they are not ‘member states’ like the United Kingdom is.
- The perception that it would be too difficult for the United Kingdom to become completely separate from Europe

“It is not clear from the answers what is included and what is not included [if we remain a member].” (Female, aged 77, mini-depth, Cardiff)

“I’m not a political person really… I’d like to stay [a member] but renegotiate the terms.” (Male, aged 67, mini-depth, Aberdeen)

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⁶ For more information regarding Norway’s relationship with the European Union please see: http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/norway/. For more information regarding Switzerland’s relationship with the EU please see: http://ec.europa.eu/trade/policy/countries-and-regions/countries/switzerland/.
Overall, the majority of participants realised early on in the discussion that they lacked knowledge relating to what the outcome of a majority vote in either direction would mean in reality. This tended to lead to further discussion and debate about what the outcomes could mean.

Participants did not think any of the questions clarified the actual terms of membership that would be under consideration. They felt that it would be essential for this information to be provided to the public ahead of any referendum to enable them to vote.

“What would be different in practice for people on a daily basis if we left?” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, C2DE, Merthyr Tydfil)

7.1.2 Nature of the referendum

Most participants assumed that the majority outcome of the referendum would result in that particular outcome being actioned by the Government. Relatively few considered whether the referendum would be binding or not. Those who did think about this tended to be those who were more engaged in politics generally or who held cynical attitudes towards the Government and so questioned whether they would follow the ‘will of the people’. Participants who recalled voting in previous referendums were more likely to realise that it might not be binding.

Consequently, some participants said they would want to know whether it would be binding or not as this would affect whether they chose to vote in the referendum or not.

7.2 Desired information

Participants agreed that they lacked information and knowledge regarding the United Kingdom’s membership of the European Union. There was a clear desire for impartial and simple information to clarify what membership means for the United Kingdom.

Desire for information regarding the structure and processes of the European Union was very limited. Participants lacked any real interest in information that simply laid out the way in which the European Union works or the governance structures. Participants instead wanted to understand how the United Kingdom fits into this structure and what membership means – in real terms.

“Well I’d imagine you’re going to have leaflets and things. It’s got to have both sides hasn’t it – pros and cons.” (Female, aged 44, mini-depth, Colwyn Bay)

“What is going in and what are we getting out, exports, imports, money, there’s a lot of questions.” (Male, aged 31, mini-depth, Aberdeen)

Participants with the lowest levels of knowledge about the European Union tended to be younger people, those with English as a second language, people with low literacy levels, and people from lower socio-economic groups with some people falling into more than one of these groups. A number of these participants were either confused about what the European Union is or, in a few instances, reported that they had never heard of it.
“What do they mean by the Union, is this a Political thing or is this a group or is this an Organisation; what is it actually to do with? Is it actually to do with money or is it to do with people or is it to do with jobs or is it to do with the imports and the out ports of the countries?”

(Female, aged 22, in-depth interview, Glasgow)

Older people tended to have higher levels of awareness and knowledge of the European Union mainly because they could recall when the United Kingdom first joined and subsequent developments since that time. Consequently, older people were more likely to refer to the European Union as the ‘Economic Community’, the ‘European Community’ or the ‘Common Market’ because these were terms that were more familiar. However, familiarity with these terms did not necessarily translate to a good understanding what the European Union is or its main functions.

“We joined the common market didn’t we…? No one envisaged the common market would morph into what we currently have. I think maybe your first paragraph [from the factsheet] was helpful to people who don’t understand everything that a European Union is, some people might think that it is just about central laws coming from Brussels. But the actual way that it’s written it is going to send people to sleep, so kind of the information in it is useful, but maybe in a more friendly way.” (Focus group participant, aged 45-59, C2DE, Exeter)

With this in mind, participants wanted clear and simple information detailing the benefits and drawbacks – ‘the pros and cons’ - of United Kingdom membership. The type of detail wanted was typically based on existing levels of awareness and knowledge regarding the European Union. Commonly requested information included detail regarding the impact of United Kingdom membership on:

- Trade
- Finances (cost of membership and income/ funding gained from membership)
- Economy
- Law
- Immigration/ border control

“What is going to happen to us if we did leave? What difference is going to happen?” (Female, aged 20, mini-depth, Aberdeen)

“What is going in and what are we getting out, exports, imports, money, there’s a lot of questions.” (Male, aged 25, mini-depth, Belfast)

Participants recognised that the European Union is a complex structure and strongly felt that any information provided to the general public should be simple, visual and jargon-free. There was a strong desire for information to be unbiased and neutral although many felt that it would be difficult for this to be the case and were unable to identify any sources they would trust to provide completely unbiased information.

However, many would expect to receive information from the Government or their local council to enable them to make an informed vote.
Younger participants tended to have a greater interest in the history of the European Union with some expressing interest in knowing how long the United Kingdom has been a member of the European Union and how many other countries are members. However, it was clear that this type of information could – in isolation – impact on general views towards United Kingdom membership.

Some noted that knowing that membership was long-standing suggested that leaving the European Union would be a real change in the way things currently work, and that they would need to feel confident that it was of benefit to the United Kingdom to leave rather than stay.

Others mentioned that knowing that there were 28 members could suggest that it was a worthwhile group to be a member of and that leaving the European Union could isolate the United Kingdom.

7.3 Information delivery
Participants with very little knowledge of the European Union tended to feel that there should be an explanatory paragraph added to the ballot paper that describes what the European Union is and clarifies what the United Kingdom being a member actually means.

However, most participants tended to feel that the information should not be on the ballot paper as the inclusion of further words would be likely to affect the neutrality of the question.

“I think you should decide before you go and vote, I don’t feel that there’s a need for it on the ballot paper.” (Female, aged 24, in-depth interview, Nottingham, Learning difficulties)

“I don’t think it should be on [the ballot paper]. It should be an absolute minimum of [words on the page] so it doesn’t influence you in any way. I think it’s really important to do that.” (Focus group participant, aged 17-24, BC1C2, Leeds)

All participants expressed a clear desire for information pertaining to the advantages and disadvantages of remaining a member of the European Union and they would want this prior to the referendum in order to help them make a decision on which way to vote.

The most frequently mentioned points for delivery were:

- Leaflets through the front door
- Media articles (newspaper and television)
- Facebook adverts with links to websites (mentioned by younger participants)
- Websites

7.4 Welsh language
In terms of information needs and expectations, the views of Welsh speaking participants tended to reinforce those in the English speaking groups. Participants typically wanted balanced, unbiased information on the benefits and costs of the UK’s membership of the EU. Participants also wanted this information to be form an
independent source although several acknowledged that this could be challenging. Financial information on the costs and benefits of the UK’s membership of the EU were particularly highlighted.

“I would like to know how the money is spent and where it has gone over the last 5 or 10 years. How much we put in and how much we get out.” (Female, 45-59, Depth interview, Welsh language)
8 Conclusion

8.1 Suitability of the proposed referendum question (Question 1)

Understanding
Whilst participants noted the language used in this question was simple and in plain English, many felt that it was misleading because it does not make clear that the United Kingdom is currently a member of the European Union. Whilst many raising this concern were themselves aware that the United Kingdom is a member, it was agreed that the question lacked clarity in this respect.

Participants suggested that the phrase ‘be a member’ could be altered to one of the following to reduce the potential for misinterpretation:

- Remain a member
- Continue to be a member
- Still be a member
- Stay a member

Any of these changes would clarify current membership status and so result in a suitable question. There was no evidence that these changes would cause participants to vote in a particular way.

Neutrality
The neutrality of this question was not an issue for most; indeed some felt that not clarifying the current membership status maintained a fair and neutral stance. However, a few participants felt that the phrase ‘should be a member’ could potentially be biased towards a ‘yes’ vote because it could be interpreted as them being told the United Kingdom ‘should be a member’. However, there was no evidence that participants’ own votes were led by this phrase and they answered in line with their intentions.

Overall, the research findings suggest that in its current form the proposed referendum question (Question 1) has the potential to mislead voters if used in a referendum and is therefore not suitable.

8.2 Suitability of Questions 2 & 3

Understanding
The short and concise nature of these questions made them easy to read and understand. Inclusion of the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ clarified current membership status and therefore provided contextual information for those who were unclear.

Neutrality
Despite some perceived mild concerns about potential bias arising from the use of ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ in the questions, some participants felt this could lead towards a particular vote, but there was no evidence that this actually caused any of the participants to vote in a particular way.
It was also clear that these perceptions of bias were not strong and most participants described 'remain' and 'continue' as being plain and ordinary language that did not affect how they interpreted the question.

This suggests that Questions 2 & 3 would be suitable for use in a referendum.

8.3 Suitability of Question 4

Understanding
The key concern with this question was that some perceived it as overly wordy and long-winded with some low literacy participants re-reading the full question in order to ensure they understood it. However, it is important to note that this was typically made in comparison to other shorter question versions. All participants understood what they were being asked and were able to answer it in the way they intended.

Other participants were keen to note that including the two options improved the clarity of the question allowing the voter to feel sure of the meaning of each option.

Neutrality
This question was clearly considered to be the most balanced and neutral question of all the six versions because it provided equal treatment of both voting options. Proving both voting options further dispersed any concerns related to the words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ (as in questions 2 and 3). There was no evidence that Question 4 was in any way misleading to participants.

Overall, the research findings suggest that Question 4 would be suitable for use in a referendum.

8.4 Suitability of Question 5

Understanding
As with question 1, the plain English used in this question makes it simple to read. When compared to the proposed referendum question (Question 1) it is considered less misleading as the preamble clarifies current membership status. However, participants still expressed some confusion regarding the phrase ‘be a member’. This would need to be altered to one of the following to rectify this:

- Remain a member
- Continue to be a member
- Still be a member
- Stay a member

Any of these changes would reduce the current perceived contradiction between the preamble and the question element and so result in a suitable question. There was no evidence that these changes would cause participants to vote in a particular way.

Neutrality
As with the proposed referendum question (Question 1), the neutrality of this question was not an issue; indeed many felt that not clarifying the current membership status maintained a fair and neutral stance.
Overall, the research findings suggest that in its current form Question 5 has the potential to mislead voters if used in a referendum and is therefore not suitable.

8.5 Suitability of Question 6

Understanding
Question 6 was considered to be clear and concise making it easy to read and understand.

Neutrality
This question was perceived to be heavily biased and leading to a ‘yes’ vote. This view was expressed by participants, regardless of their voting preference. The majority of participants who saw this question disliked it for this reason. However, despite high levels of concern about the perceived neutrality of this question, there was no evidence that it affected participants voting behaviour. The research found that participants still answered the question in the way they intended.

This suggests that the question would be suitable for use in a referendum. However, the negative comments regarding this question suggests that an alternative version of the question would be more suitable. This negativity was based on the combination of the strong and negatively perceived presence of the word ‘leave’, and the lack of an alternative option – to remain a member – that led people to assume that the question was biased to leaving the European Union. Importantly, the perceived bias towards the word ‘leave’ in Question 6 was much stronger than was the case for ‘remain’ or ‘continue’ in Questions 2 & 3.

8.6 In Summary
The research suggests that questions 2, 3 and 4 are all suitable for use in a referendum. An overview of these questions is provided below.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Understanding</th>
<th>Neutrality</th>
</tr>
</thead>
</table>
| Question 2 and Question 3 | ✓ Short and concise.  
✓ Clarifies current membership status.  | ? The words ‘remain’ and ‘continue’ could introduce some bias and lead to some assumptions on the part of the voter. However, these were mild concerns and there was no evidence that they actually caused participants to vote in a particular way. |
| Question 4 | ? Wordy and long-winded.  
✓ Clarifies current membership status.  
✓ Clarifies each voting option.  | ✓ Balanced, presenting both voting options with equal treatment. |
9 Appendix

9.1 Discussion guides

A) Focus group discussion guide

1. Moderator introduction and initial question test
   - Introduction to the research
   - Participants to answer the referendum question as if doing so for real
   - Participants asked to complete the three questions in the worksheet
     - *This is to capture individual views prior to the full discussion*

2. Participant introduction
   - Full introduction to the research
   - Further clarification of:
     - Purpose of the research
     - Definition of ‘referendum’
     - The fact that it has not yet been decided whether or not a referendum will take place
   - Respondent introductions:
     - First name
     - Working / not working

3. Completing the question: accuracy
   - Who feels confident that they gave the response they wanted to?
   - Who does not feel confident that they gave the response they wanted to?
   - What do you think the question was asking you?
   - What do you think you have voted for?
   - How did you decide whether to vote yes or no?
   - Based on the discussion so far:
     - Who feels they have given the response they wanted to? Why?
     - Who feels they have not given the response they wanted to? Why not?

4. Completing the question: literal meaning
   - What words would you use to describe the referendum question?
     - Prompt if needed:
       - Positive words: easy, clear, to the point, straightforward.
       - Negative words: difficult, unclear, longwinded, confusing.
   - Ease of understanding
     - Overall, how easy was the question to understand?
     - Which words and phrases did you identify as difficult to understand?
       - Why were these difficult to understand?
       - What words or phrases do you think other people might difficult to understand?
         - PROMPT: what do you think is meant by ‘European Union’ or ‘member of the European Union’?
     - Did the question give you the right amount of information? Why / Why not?
       - What more does it need to tell you?
       - Is that information that needs to be on the ballot paper or could it be somewhere else?
Neutrality
- Does the question make one answer option sound better than the other?
  - To what extent does it encourage people to vote one way or another?
  - Do you think the question suggests there is a correct answer?
- Does the person who wrote the question want you to vote one way or the other?
- Are there parts of the question that sounds particularly positive or negative?
  - Which parts are these?

Summary and improvements
- Do you agree or disagree that the referendum question:
  - Uses plain language?
  - Is clear in what it is asking?
  - Is biased towards one option?
  - Is to the point?
  - Is misleading to voters?
- What question would you ask if you were in charge of the referendum? Why?

5. Testing alternative wording
Show alternative wording version (see rotation schedule)
- What do you think about this question?
- Would you answer it the same as the first one we looked at?
- Is it asking the same thing?
  - How is it different to the question we looked at earlier?
  - Is there anything you do not understand?
  - What improvements could be made to this question?
- What’s different between this question and the first/second one you looked at?
  - If not raised: This question uses the word ‘x’ rather than ‘y’ – how do you feel about this?
- What works well about this wording? Why?
- What works badly about this wording? Why?
- Looking at the different options:
  - How do these questions compare?

Show alternative wording version (see rotation schedule)
- What do you think about this question?
- Would you answer it the same as the first one we looked at?
- Is it asking the same thing?
  - How is it different to the question we looked at earlier?
  - Is there anything you do not understand?
  - What improvements could be made to this question?
- What’s different between this question and the first/second one you looked at?
  - If not raised: This question uses the word ‘x’ rather than ‘y’ – how do you feel about this?
- Is it asking the same thing?
- Moderator clarify: these are two different ways of asking the same question.
- What works well about this wording? Why?
- What works badly about this wording? Why?
Stimulus: here we will directly compare all three questions. Moderator to show the questions side by side.

- Looking at the different options:
How do these questions compare?

- Overall, which question works best and why?
  - Would you change this question in any way? Why?

**6. Understanding the question in context**
- Can anyone remember there being a referendum in the UK before?
  - What was this about?
- Why might there be a referendum in the UK about the European Union?
- Thinking about the questions we have looked at:
  - Is it clear from the wording of the question what you would be voting for?
- What would happen if the majority vote no?
  - What would this mean?
  - How would this be different from the current situation?
  - What is it about the question wording that makes you think this?
- What would happen if the majority vote yes?
  - What would this mean?
  - How would this be different from the current situation?
  - What is it about the question wording that makes you think this?

**7. Reflecting on and refining the question**
- Thinking about the discussion we have just had…
  - Does this change the way you would respond to the question? How/ why?
  - Moderator: ensure discuss any changes to the way would answer the question. Start with the first question shown and then bring in second / third question shown to check whether there are any further comments.

- Looking at the first question we looked at:
  - Do you think the wording of the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer? How?
  - Moderator: check if there is any additional feedback for the other ballot.
- Looking at the second question we looked at:
  - Do you think the wording of the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer? How?
- Looking at the third question we looked at:
  - Do you think the wording of the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer? How?

- Overall, which elements of these questions would you keep?
  - Exercise: Moderator to use a flipchart to identify which changes are essential and which would be ‘nice to have’.
- Which would you change/ why?
  - Which changes do you think are essential? Why?
  - Which changes would be just nice to have?

**8. Information needs**

- What information would help you better understand the question?
- Where would you expect to find this information?
- What information would you like to know in order to enable you to vote? Why?
- What type of information would be useful? Why?
- Who do you think should be responsible for giving people this information?
- What would be the best way to provide this information?
• Overall, what one piece information would help you better understand the question?
• I’d now like to read you out some information about the EU and get your thoughts on it
• See factsheet
  o How important is it to know this piece of information?
  o To what extent does it affect how you understand the question/s?
• Please tell me more about the type of information you’d like:
  o Why would this be of interest?
  o Would you want to be told about this before the vote or after the outcome/result?
• Now we have had this discussion, has anyone changed their mind on what one piece information would help you better understand the question?

9. Summary and Close
• Who feels more confident that they understand what the referendum is about?
  o What makes you feel more confident about this?
• Who does not feel more confident that they understand what the referendum is about?
  o Why do you not feel more confident about this?
• What question would you ask if you were in charge of running the referendum?
• Thinking about everything we have looked at this evening, is there anything you would suggest we do to ensure that people understand the European Union referendum question?
• Moderator: go around the group and get an answer from each participant.

Thank and Close

B) In-depth interview discussion guide

1. Moderator introduction and initial question test
• Introduce research
• Clarify purpose of research and definition of referendum
• Ask participants to answer the referendum question as if they were doing so for real
  o See rotation schedule
• Respondent introductions:
  o Can I start just by asking a few things about you….
  o Name, age, what you do with your time

2. Completing the question: accuracy
• How confident are you that you gave the response you wanted to?
• What do you think the question was asking you?
• What do you think you have voted for?
• How did you decide whether to vote yes or no?

3. Completing the question: literal meaning
• What words would you use to describe the referendum question?
  Prompt if needed:
  o Positive words: easy, clear, to the point, straightforward.
  o Negative words: difficult, unclear, longwinded, confusing.

Ease of understanding
• Overall, how easy was the question to understand?
  o What were the main things that made it easy to understand?
What were the main things that made it difficult to understand?

Which words and phrases did you identify as difficult to understand? Please refer back to any words that you underlined in red on your worksheet.

What words or phrases do you think other people might difficult to understand?

PROMPT: what do you think is meant by ‘European Union’ or ‘member of the European Union’?

Did the question give you the right amount of information? Why / Why not?

What more does it need to tell you?

Is that information that needs to be on the ballot paper or could it be somewhere else?

Neutrality

Does the question make one answer option sound better than the other?

To what extent does it encourage people to vote one way or another?

Do you think the question suggests there is a correct answer?

Who do you think wrote this question?

Does the person who wrote the question want you to vote one way or the other?

Are there parts of the question that sounds particularly positive or negative?

Which parts are these?

Summary and improvements

Do you agree or disagree that the referendum question:

Uses plain language?

Is clear in what it is asking?

Is biased towards one option?

Is to the point?

Is misleading to voters?

What question would you ask if you were in charge of the referendum? Why?

4. Testing alternative wording

Show alternative version of the question (see rotation schedule)

What do you think about this question?

Would you answer it the same as the first one we looked at?

Is it asking the same thing?

How is it different to the question we looked at earlier?

Is there anything you do not understand?

What improvements could be made to this question?

What's different between this question and the first one you looked at?

If not raised: This question uses the word ‘x’ rather than ‘y’ – how do you feel about this?

Is it asking the same thing?

Moderator clarify: these are two different ways of asking the same question.

What works well about this wording? Why?

What works badly about this wording? Why?

Stimulus: here we will directly compare both questions. Moderator to show the questions side by side.

Looking at the different options:

How do these questions compare?

Show alternative version of the question (see rotation schedule)

What do you think about this question?

Would you answer it the same as the first one we looked at?
• Is it asking the same thing?
  o How is it different to the question we looked at earlier?
  o Is there anything you do not understand?
  o What improvements could be made to this question?
• What’s different between this question and the first/second one you looked at?
  o If not raised: This question uses the word ‘x’ rather than ‘y’ – how do you feel about this?
• Is it asking the same thing?
• Moderator clarify: these are two different ways of asking the same question.
• What works well about this wording? Why?
• What works badly about this wording? Why?
• Looking at the different options:
  o How do these questions compare?
• Overall, which question works best and why?
  o Would you change this question in any way? Why?

5. Understanding the question in context
• Can you remember there being a referendum in the UK before?
  o What was this about?
• Why might there be a referendum in the UK about the European Union?
• Thinking about the questions we have looked at:
• Is it clear from the wording of the question what you would be voting for?
• What would happen if the majority vote no?
  o What would this mean?
  o How would this be different from the current situation?
  o What is it about the question wording that makes you think this?
• What would happen if the majority vote yes?
  o What would this mean?
  o How would this be different from the current situation?
  o What is it about the question wording that makes you think this?

6. Reflecting on and refining the question
• Thinking about the discussion we have just had…
• Does this change the way you would respond to the question? How/why?
Moderator: ensure you discuss any changes to the way you would answer the question. Start with the first question shown and then bring in second / third question shown to check whether there are any further comments.
• Looking at the first question we looked at:
  o Do you think the wording of the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer? How?
  o Moderator: check if there is any additional feedback for the other ballot.
• Looking at the second question we looked at:
  o Do you think the wording of the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer? How?
• Looking at the third question we looked at:
  o Do you think the wording of the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer? How?
• Overall, which elements of these questions would you keep?
• Which would you change/why?
  o Which changes do you think are essential? Why?
  o Which changes would be just nice to have?
7. Information needs
- What information could help you better understand the question?
- Where would you expect to find this information?
- What information would you like to know in order to enable you to vote? Why?
- What type of information would be useful? Why?
- Who do you think should be responsible for giving people this information?
- What would be the best way to provide this information?
- Overall, what one piece of information would help you better understand the question?
- I’d now like to read you out some information about the EU and get your thoughts on it
  - See factsheet
  - How important is it to know this piece of information?
  - Why would this be of interest?
  - Would you want to be told about this before the vote or after the outcome/result?
- Now we have had this discussion, has anyone changed his or her mind on what one piece of information would help you better understand the question?

8. Summary and Close
- Thinking about everything we have discussed, is there anything you would suggest we do to ensure that people understand the European Union referendum question?

Thank and Close

C) Mini-depth discussion guide

1. Moderator introduction and initial question test
- Introduce research
- Clarify purpose of the research and definition of referendum
- Ask participant to answer the referendum question as if they are doing so for real
  - See rotation schedule.

2. Completing the question

Literal:
- Overall, how easy was the question to understand? Why?
  - What were the main things that made it easy to understand?
  - What were the main things that made it difficult to understand?
  - Which words and phrases did you find difficult to understand?
- PROMPT: what do you think is meant by ‘European Union’ or ‘member of the European Union’?
  - Are there parts of the question that sound particularly positive or negative?
- What words would you use to describe the referendum question?
  - Prompt if needed: Positive words: easy, clear, to the point, straightforward.
  - Negative words: difficult, unclear, longwinded, confusing.

Neutrality
- Does the question make one answer option sound better than the other?
  - To what extent does it encourage people to vote one way or another?
Do you think the question suggests there is a correct answer?

- Does the person who wrote the question want you to vote one way or the other?
- Are there parts of the question that sounds particularly positive or negative?
  - Which parts are these?
- What would you change about this question to make it easier to answer?

### Testing alternative wording

**Show alternative version of the question (see rotation schedule)**

- What do you think about this question?
- Would you answer it the same as the first one we looked at?
- *If not aware:* It is another way of asking the same question.
  - Is this clear to you?
- What works well about this wording? Why?
- What would you improve about the wording? Why?

**Stimulus:** here we will directly **compare** both questions.

- Looking at the different options:
  - How do these questions compare?

*Please note – in the final tranche, all three versions [4, 5 and 6] were shown meaning two alternatives were shown here and the section above repeated to cover both questions.*

### Improvements, information needs and close

**Improvements:**

- Moderator: please refer to marked up question.
- Looking at both of the questions we have looked at:
  - Do you think the question needs to be changed to make it easier to answer?
  - How?
  - Overall, how would you improve the questions?
- What question would you use if you were in charge of running the election?

**Information needs:**

- Moderator: please only briefly cover this.
- What information would you expect to be told about the European Union Referendum before it took place?
- What information would you like to know in order to enable you to vote? Why?

**Thank and Close**
### 9.2 Sample breakdown and question rotation

This section gives a full breakdown of the focus group, depth interview and mini-depth interview sample and quotas, and includes the question rotation across each stage of the fieldwork.

#### A) Focus group sample

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Group</th>
<th>Location</th>
<th>Key quotas (all groups with mix of gender)</th>
<th>Fieldwork stage</th>
<th>Questions shown in rotation order</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>1</td>
<td>Leeds</td>
<td>Age: 17-24 years SEG: BC1C2 Voting: Regular</td>
<td>Main stage 1</td>
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<tr>
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<td>Age: 60+ years SEG: C2DE Voting: Irregular / non-voters</td>
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<tr>
<td>3</td>
<td>Exeter</td>
<td>Age: 45-59 years SEG: C2DE Voting: Regular</td>
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<tr>
<td>13</td>
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### B) Depth interview sample

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<td>Colwyn Bay</td>
<td>Female Age 51, C2DE, Regular voter</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<td>Male Age 25, C2DE, Irregular / non-voter, Learning difficulty</td>
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<td>2 3 1</td>
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<td>7</td>
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<td>Female Age 28, C2DE, Regular voter, Learning difficulty</td>
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<tr>
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</tr>
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European Union Referendum Question Testing
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<td>Female</td>
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<td>BC1C2</td>
<td>Regular voter, Welsh language</td>
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C) Mini-depth interviews

The table on the following page gives a breakdown of the quotas achieved across the mini-depth interviews.
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<th>Quota Target</th>
<th>Belfast</th>
<th>Omagh</th>
<th>Aberystwyth</th>
<th>Glasgow</th>
<th>Leeds</th>
<th>Nottingham</th>
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<td>Living with parents/Living with friends (children NOT at home)</td>
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<td>I always vote at General Elections</td>
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<td>I usually vote at General Elections</td>
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<td>3</td>
<td>4</td>
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<td>1</td>
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<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>I never vote at General Elections</td>
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<td>1</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>1</td>
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<td>TOTAL per location</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>10</td>
<td>9</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>10</td>
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<td>10</td>
<td>103</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
9.3 Factsheet

The factsheet below was used by moderators to answer any questions raised by participants, and as a prompt around the type of information they might find useful to know to help them to vote.

**What is a referendum?**
Referendums are held to ask people to vote on a proposal.

**Has there been a referendum in the UK before?**

Since 1973 there have been eleven referendums held by the Government of the United Kingdom, the majority of them have been related to the issue of devolution. The first UK-wide referendum was held in 1975 on the United Kingdom’s continued membership of the European Community:

- Northern Ireland sovereignty referendum, 1973, on whether Northern Ireland should remain part of the United Kingdom or join the Republic of Ireland (UK)
- United Kingdom European Communities membership referendum, 1975, on whether the UK should remain part of the European Economic Community (yes)
- Scottish devolution referendum, 1997, on whether there should be a Scottish Assembly (small majority voted yes, but fell short of the 40% threshold required to enact devolution)
- Welsh devolution referendum, 1997, on whether there should be a Welsh Assembly (yes)
- Scottish devolution referendum, 1997, Two questions: On whether there should be a Scottish Parliament (yes), On whether a Scottish Parliament should have tax varying powers (yes)
- Welsh devolution referendum, 1997, on whether there should be a National Assembly for Wales (yes)
- Greater London Authority referendum, 1998, on whether there should be a Mayor of London and Greater London Authority (yes)
- Northern Ireland Belfast Agreement referendum, 1998, on the Good Friday Agreement (yes)
- North East England devolution referendum, 2004, on an elected regional assembly (no)
- Welsh devolution referendum, 2011 (yes)
- United Kingdom Alternative Vote referendum, 2011, 5 May 2011 (no)

There have also been local referendums:

- Local referendums on directly elected mayors
- Neighbourhood planning referendums (Exeter, Thame and Eden)

**The 1975 EU referendum**
The question asked at the 1975 EU referendum was:

*Do you think the UK should stay in the European Community (Common Market)?* Turnout was 65%, with 67% of voters voting yes.

**Will there be a referendum for this question?**
This has not yet been decided. Some MPs want the law changed so that the Government has to hold a referendum before the end of 2017 that asks the people of the UK to give their preference on whether the UK should remain in the EU. However, this has not been agreed and so we are unable to say whether there will or will not be a referendum about EU membership.

**When will the referendum be?**
As it has not been decided whether a referendum will take place then we cannot answer this at the moment.

**Why are you doing research if the referendum might not even happen?**
The Electoral Commission is legally required to comment on the intelligibility of any referendum question contained in a Bill presented to the UK Parliament. The European Union Referendum Bill was introduced to the House of Commons by James Wharton MP on 5 June 2013.

**What is the European Union?**
The European Union is made up of 28 individual countries (including the UK) that have formed a political and economic union. The European Union is made up of a range of political, economic and judicial institutions which include the European Parliament, European Commission and European Central Bank.
**Number of EU members:** 28

**Institutions of the European Union:**
Executive: European Commission  
Legislatures: European Parliament, Council of the European Union  
Other institutions: European Council, Court of Justice of the European Union, European Central Bank, European Court of Auditors

**EU Parliamentary elections (including next date):**
The EU parliament is elected every 5 years and is made up of 736 MEPs who are chosen from the 28 member states. The UK is represented by 72 MEPs. In the UK, there are 12 European electoral regions and each region is represented by between three and ten MEPs. The next election in the UK is scheduled for 22 May 2014.

**Date that UK joined:**
The UK joined what was then called the European Communities in 1973 (made up of the European Economic Community, European Coal and Steel Community and the European Atomic Energy Community). The European Union came into being in 1993 and incorporated other existing European institutions such as the European Economic Community.

**Overview of how EU law gets made:**
In principle, the European Commission proposes new laws, and the European Parliament and Council adopt them. The Commission and the member countries then implement them, and the Commission ensures that the laws are properly applied and implemented.

**Outcome of voting:**
We do not know at this point what the outcome of a majority yes or no vote would be. This would be likely to become much clearer closer to a referendum as ‘yes’ and ‘no’ campaigns set out their intent.
9.4 Ballot papers

Please note, the ballot papers were designed to simulate a real life voting situation. However, the focus of the research was on the wording of the questions and not the layout of the ballot paper.

A) English ballot papers

*Question 1*

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>BALLOT PAPER</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vote (X) ONLY ONCE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
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*Question 2*

<table>
<thead>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Vote (X) ONLY ONCE</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>YES</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
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</table>
### Question 3

**BALLOT PAPER**

**Vote (X) ONLY ONCE**

Should the United Kingdom continue to be a member of the European Union?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
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### Question 4

**BALLOT PAPER**

**Vote (X) ONLY ONCE**

Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Remain a member of the European Union</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Leave the European Union</td>
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### Question 5

**BALLOT PAPER**

**Vote (X) ONLY ONCE**

The United Kingdom is a member of the European Union.

Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>YES</th>
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</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>NO</td>
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### B) Bilingual Welsh ballot papers

**Question 1**

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</tbody>
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Pleidleisiwch (X) UNWAITH YN UNIG

Vote (X) ONLY ONCE

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Ydych chi'n meddwl y dylai'r Deyrnas Unedig fod yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd?</th>
<th>Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>YDW</td>
<td>YES</td>
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<tr>
<td>NAC YDW</td>
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**Question 2**

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Pleidleisiwch (X) UNWAITH YN UNIG

Vote (X) ONLY ONCE

<table>
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<th>A ddylai'r Deyrnas Unedig ddal i fod yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd?</th>
<th>Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DYLAI</td>
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**Question 3**

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Pleidleisiwch (X) UNWAITH YN UNIG

Vote (X) ONLY ONCE

<table>
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<tr>
<th>A ddylai’r Deyrnas Unedig bara yn aelod o’r Undeb Ewropeaidd?</th>
<th>Should the United Kingdom continue to be a member of the European Union?</th>
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**Question 4**

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Pleidleisiwch (X) UNWAITH YN UNIG

Vote (X) ONLY ONCE

| A ddylai’r Deyrnas Unedig bara i fod yn aelod o’r Undeb Ewropeaidd neu adael yr Undeb Ewropeaidd? | Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union? |
| Para i fod yn aelod o’r Undeb Ewropeaidd                                                  |                                                                                          |
| Gadael yr Undeb Ewropeaidd                                                              |                                                                                          |
| Remain a member of the European Union                                                   |                                                                                          |
| Leave the European Union                                                               |                                                                                          |
**Question 5**

<table>
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<td><strong>Vote (X) ONLY ONCE</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Mae'r Deyrnas Unedig yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd.</td>
<td>The United Kingdom is a member of the European Union.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ydych chi'n meddwl y dylai'r Deyrnas Unedig fod yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd?</td>
<td>Do you think the United Kingdom should be a member of the European Union?</td>
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<th><strong>YDW</strong></th>
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**Question 6**

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<table>
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