

NORTH EAST REFERENDUM 2004: CAMPAIGNING

REPORT FOR THE ELECTORAL COMMISSION

by

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EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Campaigners

- The organisations which played a significant part in the Assembly campaign were:

For Yes

Yes4thenortheast (Y4NE)
The Labour Party
The Liberal Democrats
The TUC (Northern Region)
GMB
Unison

For No

North East Says No (NESNO)
North East No Campaign (NENC)
The Conservative and Unionist Party
UK Independence Party (UKIP)

- Y4NE and NESNO were the respective ‘designated organisations’. All other groups listed on the Yes side were affiliated with Y4NE; on the No side the Conservatives and UKIP were affiliated with NESNO but NENC ran an independent campaign.
- Other groups registered as participants – the Senior Citizens Party, the British National Party and the English Democrats party – played little or no part in the campaign.

Campaigning

- The core activities of effective constituency campaigns in general elections are identifying supporters and mobilising them on polling day but this approach was not possible in the referendum because voting was by post and was spread over several days, party workers were not as enthusiastic as in a general election and party records of past voting in elections are not necessarily a good guide to referendum voting.
- Nonetheless, there was vigorous campaigning involving:
 - A leaflet delivered free to every elector (designated organisations only)
 - Leaflets and stickers distributed by volunteers/street stalls
 - E-mailing members and known supporters
 - Press advertising and billboards
 - Visits by party VIPs and endorsements by celebrities
 - Public debates (some sponsored by the Newcastle *Journal*)
 - Press releases
 - Campaign ‘stunts’
 - Campaign television broadcasts (two each by Y4NE and NESNO)

- The designated organisations each had a website but neither thought this a very effective campaign tool. Both were also less than enthusiastic about the debates.
- Most observers believed that the campaign stunts mounted by NESNO were the more effective, especially their inflatable ‘white elephant’ which toured the region. In contrast, Y4NE’s ‘RATS’ initiative (labelling the No side as ‘Rather Arrogant Toff Southerners’) came in for heavy criticism.
- Most also thought that overall, although YES4NE ran a very professional operation, NESNO was more effective in getting across a very stark and simple message.
- A number of ‘campaign monitors’ reported that from the perspective of voters the campaign was highly visible and suggested that few voters in the region could have been unaware of the referendum.

The media

- The referendum was a very big story for the regional media. The campaign was given extensive coverage in the more ‘serious’ newspapers such as the Newcastle *Journal* and *Northern Echo* and was also well covered in the region by the BBC (both on television and radio and also via a special website) and, to a lesser extent, Tyne Tees television.
- Analysis of letters to the editors of three papers suggests that there was increasing interest in the referendum on the part of the public. Letters supporting No clearly outnumbered those advocating a Yes vote.
- The campaign monitors all agreed that there was ample coverage of the campaign in the local and regional media.
- NESNO had serious reservations about the way in which guidelines pertaining to balance in coverage were interpreted by the BBC.
- For different reasons, Y4NE was unhappy about the arrangements for the referendum broadcasts.

Local government referendums

- Four groups, specially formed for the purpose, registered to campaign in the local government referendums:

Durham County Supporters Club

Friends of Northumberland County

Supporters of Rural Northumberland

South East Northumberland Unitary Council

- All were formed and financed by, and mainly consisted of, local councillors. They distributed leaflets and advertised in the local press.
- The main campaign organisations involved in the Assembly referendum tended to regard the local government referendums as something of a distraction.

Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA)

- The process of registering as a participant caused few problems.
- The expenditure limits imposed caused no problems at all.
- It was strongly argued by NESNO that the Act was flawed in that there appears to be no way of enforcing section 125 which deals with the activities of government ministers and local authorities.
- Almost all campaign organisations found the requirements of the Act burdensome.

The role of the Commission

- In order to encourage voting the Commission advertised extensively in the local press, distributed information leaflets and also provided information in a special television broadcast. In the event, turnout was at a satisfactory level.
- Many campaigners were very positive about the part played by the Commission and were complimentary about the helpfulness of staff.
- Some found it difficult to separate criticisms of what the Commission did from criticisms of PPERA and other regulations governing the Commission's activities.
- Criticisms of the Commission focussed on:
 - The designation process* – the procedures were flawed and inadequate.
 - Timing* – the campaign timetable was too compressed.
 - Finance* – the amount given to the designated organisations was inadequate.
 - Remoteness* – Commission staff were not easily available during the campaign.
 - Bias* – campaigners for No believed that the information circulated by the Commission too closely reflected the ODPM's interpretation of the White Paper, which was itself an issue in the campaign.
- The designated organisations were surprised and displeased that the Commission released the telephone numbers of their headquarters to inquirers.

- In general, campaigners were surprised that the Commission did not take a more proactive role during the referendum campaign, particularly in relation to alleged breaches of the regulations during the ‘purdah’ period.

The conduct of the referendum

- Although there was disquiet over the lengthy delay in announcing the referendum results on the evening of November 4th, it was generally agreed that the Chief Counting Officer and his staff did a very good job and were very helpful.
- The devolution of administration to the 23 Districts caused a great deal of confusion and much work for campaigners, especially in relation to the appointment of referendum agents, counting agents and scrutineers.
- In some authorities arrangements to allow campaign representatives to observe the process were inadequate.

Lessons for the Commission

- Pre-campaign briefings, visits by compliance staff and detailed information for campaigners on the website should be continued.
- Advertising in the press and on television to encourage participation should also be continued.
- Designation should take place much earlier, allow time to investigate the claims of applicants and include interviews with a short-list. The decision should not involve anyone with even tenuous links to either side.
- A temporary special unit should be established to respond promptly to enquiries from campaigners.
- The Commission should attempt to clarify its monitoring role during the campaign.
- The Commission should probably not attempt to provide information about the issue to be decided (whether in a leaflet or otherwise).

FULL REPORT

1. Introduction

Voting in the referendum on the establishment of a North East Regional Assembly took place (by post) between Wednesday 20th October and Thursday 4th November 2004. In addition, two areas (the counties of Durham and Northumberland) also had referendums on the structure of local government that should replace the existing structure if the main vote went in favour of an Assembly. In the period leading up to the referendums – and during the voting period itself – there was a lively campaign involving protagonists on either side of the issue(s).

This report seeks to describe and evaluate these campaigns. It is largely based on interviews with key people involved and with others who played an important part in reporting the campaign in the regional media. Where unattributed quotations are given in the text they are taken from these interviews. In addition, the report makes use of a content analysis of three regional newspapers - *The Journal* (Newcastle), *Northern Echo* (Darlington) and *Evening Gazette* (Middlesbrough) - and informal reports compiled by 11 ‘campaign monitors’ (acquaintances and friends of acquaintances of the author) living in different parts of the region.

The report is structured by – but also goes beyond – six major topics specified by the Electoral Commission in its ‘Invitation to Tender’ document. These, in brief, are:

- Participants in the referendum campaign
- Campaigning methods used
- The relative effectiveness of campaign methods
- Reactions of the media and electors to the campaign
- The effects of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA)
- The Commission’s role in the referendum

The local government referendums are considered in a separate section.

2. Registered participants in the referendum campaign

Seven organisations registered as permitted participants to campaign for a Yes vote on the question of a Regional Assembly. These were:

Yes4thenortheast (Y4NE) - the designated organisation for Yes.

The Labour Party

The Liberal Democrats

The TUC (Northern Region)

GMB

Unison

The Senior Citizens Party

One individual also registered as a participant on the Yes side – (David Stephens, the leader of Blyth Valley Borough Council in Northumberland). It proved impossible to arrange an interview with Mr. Stephens but his registering as a Yes campaigner may well have been a misunderstanding since he also registered a group to campaign in the local government referendum in Northumberland and that is where his activity was directed.

On the No side, there were six registered participants:

North East Says No (NESNO) – the designated organisation for No.

North East No Campaign (NENC)

The Conservative and Unionist Party

UK Independence Party (UKIP)

British National Party (BNP)

English Democrats Party (EDP)

The following section provides a brief account of each of the participating organisations and of the nature and extent of their involvement in the campaign

‘Yes’ Campaigners

Yes4thenortheast

The designated organisation for Yes was clearly an ‘umbrella’ organisation in the sense that its leaders conceived of its role as being mainly to co-ordinate and assist the campaigns being mounted by the parties and unions affiliated with it. Nonetheless, Y4NE was clearly the key campaign organisation on the Yes side, providing speakers, information, literature and a web site as well as organising stunts, preparing the referendum broadcasts and distributing the ‘free’ leaflet to all electors. It had been set up well in advance as a limited company by people who had been active in the Campaign for a Northern Assembly and the North East Constitutional Convention and was launched in June 2003, with Ross Forbes as Campaign Director, a board, and a council comprising representatives of affiliated organisations. The Chair and chief spokesperson was Professor John Tomaney. A headquarters was established in the centre of Durham City and during the campaign, in addition to Professor Tomaney, key spokespersons included Sir John Hall (former chairman of Newcastle United football club),

Ray Mallon (mayor of Middlesbrough), Julie Elliott (a regional official of the GMB union) and Susannah Clark (an opera singer).

The Labour Party

The Labour party has the most formidable campaign machine in the North East. Although working closely with Y4NE (partly, it was suggested, ‘in an advisory capacity’) the party ran its own separate campaign under the direction of Emma Thorne, the Regional Organiser. Up to 15 staff were involved at the regional headquarters and the party distributed its own literature through constituency parties. Visits to the region by ministers and the Prime Minister during the campaign were organised by the party.

The Liberal Democrats

Two Liberal Democrats were on the Council of Yes4NE and one was a ‘permanent volunteer’ at Y4NE headquarters. Although most activity was channelled through the umbrella group and in each constituency where it has an organisation the party had a designated person to act as a link between the Yes campaign and local members, there was also a separate party campaign, which mainly took the form of distributing ‘Focus’ leaflets in some areas. Nonetheless, while some constituency parties actively campaigned to some extent, others were not seriously involved.

TUC (Northern Region)

The regional secretary of the TUC, Kevin Rowan, was on the board of Y4NE and both he and the regional policy officer, Peter O’Brien, acted as spokespersons for the Yes campaign – both with respect to the media and in public debates. The TUC provided financial help to Y4NE but also produced and distributed 40,000 copies of a ‘joint union leaflet’ addressed to trade union members as well as a booklet explaining what were seen to be the benefits of a regional assembly. In addition, union members in the region were sent emails on the issue.

GMB

Julie Elliott, a regional organiser for the union, worked ‘practically full-time’ for Y4NE and played a prominent part in the campaign, being, among other things, a regular speaker in debates. During the last month of the campaign most union organisers were involved to some degree. From the time that Y4NE was established, the union provided money, time and advertising space in its magazine (which goes to every member) as well as having window posters displayed at its Newcastle offices. In addition, there were direct mailings to targeted members and also mailings to branches.

Unison

Unison had a large 'Vote Yes' banner strung along the face of its headquarters in Newcastle and provided initial financial help to Y4NE. The union also sponsored advertisements and (through the national office) organised a direct mailing of a leaflet to members in the region.

The Senior Citizens Party

The Senior Citizens party – a tiny group - initially registered as a participant on the Yes side (on the mistaken assumption that they would be given some money to campaign) but subsequently changed its mind about the outcome that it preferred. In the event, the group cannot really be counted as a campaign participant – it spent no money and played no part apart (possibly) from sending emails to (what must be a relatively small number of) people on its mailing list. On the other hand, the party leader, Mr. Leon-Smith did visit the region to announce his party's switch and was photographed with Neil Herron of NENC (*Northern Echo* 26/10/04).

'No' Campaigners

North East Says No

The designated organisation for the No side described itself as 'a coalition of North East businesspeople, entrepreneurs, academics, public sector workers, farmers and members of the public'. In a list of 112 prominent supporters published on its website, at least 66 were prominent in business (the list also included 9 knights and 7 members of the peerage). On the initiative of a group of businessmen led by John Elliott, exploratory moves began in the Spring of 2004 and, following negotiations at the regional Conservative party conference, NESNO was formed in July of that year as a limited company. Key spokespersons during the campaign were John Elliott (Chairman, Ebac Ltd), Graham Robb (a PR Consultant) and Ian Dormer (Director, Rosh Engineering). The key full-time campaign staff, working out of headquarters in Durham, were James Frayne (Campaign Director) Alex Ray (Campaign Manager) and William Norton (Referendum Agent) all of whom had campaigning experience elsewhere. There were also 14 (voluntary) organisers across the region. Although the organisation made use of Conservative and UKIP 'foot soldiers' to get the message across, it was highly active in organising campaign stunts, issuing press releases, providing speakers and, of course, preparing the 'free' delivery leaflet and the referendum broadcasts.

North East No Campaign

NENC grew out of the Sunderland ‘metric martyrs’ campaign set up in 2000 to protest against compulsory metrication. In 2002 this broadened out into the North East Campaign Against Regional Assemblies and in February 2004 a loose coalition of those involved formalised itself as a registered company to campaign in the referendum. The group applied for designated status and was extremely disappointed not to be successful. Nonetheless, it participated extensively in the campaign – producing and delivering leaflets, advertising in local papers, providing speakers for debates and issuing press releases. NENC relied heavily on its website and emails (‘the major tool of the campaign’) even though there were only about 1,000 people in the region on the email circulation list. No politicians – at least none from mainstream parties – were involved in the group, which described itself as ‘a people’s campaign...(having)...no official connections with any other organisations’. Some observers referred to NENC as ‘a one-man band’, referring to the Campaign Director, Neil Herron. This is rather unfair – indeed, John Elliott, later of NESNO, was initially chairman of NENC. Nonetheless, working out of headquarters in Sunderland (the ‘metric martyrs’ office), Mr. Herron – a well-known figure in the North East – was the main spokesperson and driving force of the campaign. Although there were tensions between NENC and NESNO, informal contacts were maintained throughout the campaign.

The Conservative Party

The Conservatives were affiliated with NESNO and Veronica Jones, the party’s Area Campaign Director, was described as a ‘full-time volunteer’ in the campaign. Her campaign role was to liaise between NESNO and the constituency associations. The party basically provided the ground troops for the campaign – delivering leaflets, organising street stalls, contacting supporters by phone, and so on. There was also a regional mailing to members and supporters.

UK Independence Party

UKIP also affiliated with NESNO and provided workers on the ground, especially in areas in the south of the region where it is relatively strong (although some volunteers also came in from the North West). The party produced and distributed 50,000 of its own leaflets and also organised street stalls in a number of towns. In addition, the party’s telephone call centre (in Preston) was used to contact members and supporters. Liaison between UKIP and NESNO was undertaken by Stephen Allison, who had been UKIP candidate in the Hartlepool by-election and was the North East Counties Organiser. NESNO officials paid tribute to UKIP’s contribution, noting that ‘they have a lot of very good, willing people’.

British National Party

The BNP made an application for designated status. This was not done with any realistic expectation of success but as a way of obtaining useful publicity. The party operated on its own during the campaign and distributed leaflets in selected wards in Newcastle, Gateshead and Sunderland – wards that they expect to contest in the next local elections – at a cost of a few hundred pounds. Media observers commented, however, that the BNP seemed to disappear from view as the campaign progressed.

English Democrats Party

The EDP is a tiny group (claiming 4,000 ‘enquirers, associates and members’ nationwide) whose members have links to other groups such as the Campaign for an English Parliament, and Steadfast. They had about 15 people active in the campaign and their contribution was to deliver some leaflets provided by NENC (which they had hoped would be the designated organisation). There were informal contacts between the EDP and NENC. (Indeed, in a bizarre ending to the campaign Neil Herron and other NENC leaders were only allowed in to the Sunderland count – there having been a mix-up over the requisite forms – because the EDP referendum agent added them to his list of those permitted to attend.)

Summary

The Yes campaign was relatively well-organised and united. All participants, while to a greater or lesser extent making their own campaign efforts, worked through Y4NE which coordinated activities and took the lead in organising major initiatives and events. The No campaign was more fragmented. NESNO played a similar role in respect of the Conservatives and UKIP; NENC, on the whole, campaigned separately; the BNP ploughed a lonely (and, from the perspective of the campaign overall, not very important) furrow. The role of fringe groups was negligible.

3. Campaigning Methods

Local campaigning in any referendum is bound to be different from the style of campaigning which is familiar in general elections. There are no candidates but merely a single issue; past canvass records are not a good guide to likely vote; experienced campaigners on the ground may be divided on the issue, may not participate and are likely to be less enthusiastic. The latter was certainly true of all parties in the North East referendum. In addition, this referendum involved all-postal voting so that there was no fixed polling day. It was not possible, therefore, to mount the standard type of campaign which involves identifying

supporters and getting them out on the day. Nonetheless, both sides ran lively campaigns and in this section I provide a description of the methods that they used to get their message across to the electorate.

Contacting individual voters

The key activity in a well-run constituency election campaign is identifying potential supporters by contacting individually – on the doorstep or by telephone – as many electors as possible. This is a precursor to effective mobilisation. In the referendum, however, participants did not have the resources to undertake canvassing of this kind to any extent. In the case of the major parties, their workers may have been tired – they had already fought the European Parliament elections earlier in the year and some had been involved in the Hartlepool by-election - and many simply did not have the enthusiasm that they would bring to a general election campaign. Rather than contacting the electorate at large, therefore, campaigning organisations concentrated on contacting and attempting to energise their own members and known supporters. This was done to some extent by email (Labour, the TUC, and NENC), by telephone (Labour, Conservatives, UKIP) and also by mailings to members and branches (Labour, GMB, Unison, Conservatives).

'Freepost' Leaflets

The two designated organisations were allowed free delivery of one piece of literature to every elector. Both were at pains to emphasise that this was not a 'free' leaflet since they had to pay for the production of just under two million of them (as well as deal with an unexpectedly large number of returns). Y4NE's leaflet took the form of a letter from Brendan Foster (the former athlete and now television commentator) together with supporting statements from local personalities, while NESNO's contained a simple statement of arguments against an Assembly.

Hand-out Leaflets/Stickers/Posters/Street stalls

Almost all participants prepared and distributed leaflets for distribution by volunteers. Y4NE had 'loads and loads' which were very professionally designed, produced on glossy paper and featured the campaign's logo. Labour also had professionally designed and produced leaflets – which indulged in more aggressive 'Tory bashing' than those of Y4NE – for distribution, while the Liberal Democrats used their traditional 'Focus' leaflets (simple photocopied small newsletters) to promote the case for the Assembly.

On the No side, NESNO leaflets looked more cheaply produced but were widely distributed. The Conservatives used these leaflets but also had an extra one in South Tyneside (where

there is a Conservative mayor). NENC leaflets (a single A4 sheet printed on both sides) were distributed ‘all over the region’ while UKIP gave out 50,000 copies of its own leaflet (‘Stop the Carve up of England’) mainly in the south of the region. The BNP had a small leaflet printed on one side only (‘The British National Party Says No’) which was distributed in selected areas while the EDP delivered some NENC leaflets but in some cases also added a photocopied sheet about ‘Steadfast’.

Relatively small numbers of window posters were produced by Y4NE (again easily the most professional looking), Labour, NESNO and NENC (whose posters could be downloaded and printed from their website). Only Y4NE and the Labour party distributed stickers for cars or lapel use – both again featuring the Y4NE logo. Street stalls – set up in busy shopping areas and the like, usually on Saturdays – were extensively used by Labour, the Conservatives (under the aegis of NESNO) and UKIP for ‘high visibility’ campaigning. On one Saturday, for example, the Conservatives had stalls in towns such as Guiseborough, Alnwick, Hexham, Berwick and Morpeth while UKIP regularly had six or more in locations in the south of the region.

Press releases

The two umbrella groups and NENC (and, to a lesser extent, the regional TUC) devoted considerable efforts to issuing press releases – ‘thousands’ according to Y4NE and ‘almost every day’ for NESNO. Despite this flood, all of the media representatives interviewed said that they found the press releases useful - ‘I’d rather get them than not’ (BBC); ‘websites are good for journalists but emails are even better’ (*Northern Echo*).

Press Advertising/Advertising hoardings

NESNO eschewed paid advertisements in the local and regional press but ads were placed by YES4NE and NENC. Three papers were studied during the four weeks of the campaign and, in that period, they contained six Y4NE ads and four NENC ads (as well as 16 from the Electoral Commission). On the other hand, only NESNO purchased advertising space on billboards, while admitting that some of the locations were not ideal.

Websites

NESNO, NENC and Y4NE all had new, professionally designed websites for the referendum campaign and put considerable efforts into maintaining them. The two designated organisations did not rate their usefulness as a campaign tool very highly, however. Both suggested that their website was visited by their opponents and by journalists but had little

impact on the electorate. For NENC, however, the website was a central element in the campaign ('we couldn't function as a campaign without the internet').

VIP visits

In general elections, party VIPs visit key seats in order to impress the electorate and encourage their troops. In the referendum almost all such visits were on the Yes side. Tony Blair and Gordon Brown made campaign visits, while John Prescott was a regular campaigner. These visits caused a deal of controversy since PPERA prescribes a 'purdah' period during which government ministers should not campaign in that capacity. The Labour party, while acknowledging that 'there's a very difficult line you have to draw', argued that ministerial visits were strictly party events, organised through the party. Others who came to support the Yes cause included Charles Kennedy (three times), Ken Livingstone (Mayor of London), Rhodri Morgan (First Minister of Wales) and Jack McConnell (Scottish First Minister). To say the least, the decision to invite Mr. McConnell was surprising, given the contemporary publicity over the cost of the Scottish Parliament building and the insistent argument of No campaigners that a Northern Assembly would be a waste of money. On the other side, the Conservative leader, Michael Howard, also made a brief visit to the region during the campaign but he addressed a private dinner and was not reported as speaking about the referendum.

Celebrities

Y4NE also made a great deal of use of non-political celebrities to publicise their case. In addition to Brendan Foster, others involved included Jack Charlton, Alan Shearer and other Newcastle United footballers (much to the chagrin, one suspects, of Sunderland supporters), the singer Sting and Jill Halfpenny (an actress). There was apparently also an abortive attempt to get Paul Gascoigne to record a contribution for television. The thinking behind this strategy was that, initially at least, the Yes campaign did not want the Assembly issue to be politicised in a party sense. Given a climate in which politicians are unpopular, it was believed that it would be an advantage 'to present the Yes campaign as one which had endorsements from trusted individuals'. NESNO, on the other hand, did not seek celebrity endorsements of this kind although their website emphasised that they were supported by leading business people in the region.

Public Debates

Public meetings are now almost extinct in election campaigns in urban areas but in the referendum campaign four public debates were sponsored by the Newcastle *Journal* (in

Newcastle, Hexham, Durham and Alnwick) and many others were held throughout the region by local organisations such as churches, rotary, student unions and others. Y4NE, NESNO and NENC regularly provided speakers but several respondents expressed doubts about the value of these debates. One frequent speaker described the Journal debates as ‘probably a waste of time’ because each side tried to pack the meetings with its own supporters, while others suggested that it was frequently a case of preaching to the converted.

Television and Radio

Each of the designated organisations had two campaign broadcasts on television and both contracted specialist companies to produce the broadcasts. Y4NE was unhappy about the arrangements for the broadcasts, however. The programmes were aired on the 14th and 15th of October and on the 1st and 2nd of November. On both occasions the No broadcast went out on the first evening and the Yes broadcast on the second (a decision made on the toss of a coin). This meant that the last Yes broadcast went out on the Tuesday before the polls closed so that it was already too late for voters to post their ballots.

Both sides also provided speakers for televised debates, radio phone-ins and so on. In this case it was the No campaign which was peeved at the BBC. When John Prescott was scheduled to appear in a radio phone-in programme the BBC insisted that No be represented by a national (Conservative) politician. For understandable reasons – the general unpopularity of the Conservatives in the area – NESNO refused, and the BBC used a UKIP representative instead. NESNO representatives argued that this was ‘shocking’ and that the BBC guidelines for covering referendums should be changed so that the umbrella groups should choose their own representatives.

Campaign stunts

Both Y4NE, NESNO and also, to a lesser extent, NENC made use of carefully prepared campaign stunts to generate publicity. On the Yes side, the most notorious of these involved a man dressed as a rat attempting to deliver to the NESNO headquarters a one-way train ticket to London. The NESNO campaign team was described as ‘RATS’, which stood for ‘Rather Arrogant Toff Southerners’ (although the ‘T’ was widely interpreted as ‘Tory’). There is little doubt that this stunt backfired. The generally supportive *Journal* produced a critical editorial (19/10/04) while the strongly pro-Yes *Northern Echo* (20/10/04) said that ‘the stunt was as misjudged as the acronym was excruciating’. Media respondents were scathing, with one describing the stunt as ‘just rubbish’.

Among other stunts, NESNO staged the burning of millions of pounds of false banknotes and a JCB apparently preparing the ground for a new Assembly building. Their most successful stunt, however, was an inflatable white elephant which toured the region and attracted much coverage in the media. According to NESNO, the white elephant ‘symbolised and summed up our case’, and most observers judged it to be a very successful campaign coup. The white elephant was described as ‘visually brilliant’ by one media respondent and ‘the ace up the No campaign’s sleeve’ by the BBC local government correspondent (website 5/11/04). Another media interviewee elaborated: ‘(Unlike the Rat) the white elephant actually meant something. People see it, they understand the phrase, understand the point being made.’ In the subsequent debate in the House of Commons on the referendum even the Deputy Prime Minister conceded that the Assembly had been voted down because people ‘thought that it would be a white elephant’ (*Hansard*, 4 Nov. 2004, col. 596).

4. Relative effectiveness of campaign methods and evaluations of the campaigns

Given that a standard ‘canvass and knock up’ campaign is not generally possible in referendums (and certainly not in this case), it is difficult for campaigners to know in advance what campaign techniques will prove most effective. For that reason, they tend to adopt a ‘scattergun’ approach – trying to do all the things that campaigns usually do (delivering leaflets, getting publicity and so on). Moreover, assessing the effectiveness of any particular campaign technique in any rigorous way would require a specialised and sophisticated research design. It is useful, however, to report the techniques that the main campaigners themselves considered most effective – with the benefit of hindsight.

Y4NE considered newspaper advertising, their website and their election broadcasts (for reasons already described) as not particularly effective means of campaigning. They believed, on the other hand, that the freepost leaflet was important and also their ability to generate news stories in the press, suggesting that they received ‘the lion’s share of the coverage’.

NESNO respondents agreed that the freepost leaflet was important and effective in the campaign (‘the only way of getting to every single person’) and believed that getting extensive media coverage of their stunts (especially the white elephant) was a significant bonus for their campaign. Like Y4NE, NESNO regarded their website as not particularly effective in reaching or persuading voters.

As regards the overall effectiveness of the two campaigns, most observers agreed that the No side had the better of it. Y4NE was highly polished and professional (‘as a slick operation,

clearly the Yes campaign was ahead of the field'). Their campaign materials and referendum broadcasts were technically superior to those of their opponents. In August, Y4NE engaged ICM to undertake private polling on their behalf and used the results to help determine campaign strategy. Initially, their approach emphasised positive emotional appeals – 'Be proud, be positive' – which one media respondent characterised as 'gentle mood music'. As the campaign progressed (perhaps because they felt that the tide was running against them) negative attacks on their opponents began to predominate. As previously indicated, this did not go down well. The campaign's use of celebrities came in for criticism from media respondents, one suggesting that the celebrities plainly didn't understand the issues and another that they were actually divisive figures (e.g. Sir John Hall). There was also an apparent paradox in the campaign in that, although Y4NE was perfectly aware that there was considerable antipathy to politicians among the electorate (and the No campaign incessantly attacked the proposed Assembly on the grounds that it would mean (allegedly) more politicians), a regular stream of politicians came to the region to support the Yes case. Respondents recognised, however, that Y4NE was in a difficult position in that it could hardly blame the ills of the North East on the current government or on rule from Westminster, given its Labour and trade union backing.

Although one particular stunt came in for criticism (the one involving a JCB), the NESNO campaign was generally praised by respondents. They deliberately decided to emphasise the contrast between themselves and the Yes side by not having expensive campaign materials and keeping their broadcasts basic and simple ('no razzamatazz'). Their campaign hammered away at three straightforward messages 'Vote No to increased council tax, to more politicians and to a white elephant Assembly'. Interviewees described this as 'stark and simple' and 'a very distinctive and easily understood message' and thought that 'they've got those messages out very effectively'. In getting their messages across, NESNO was described as 'very keen, very nimble, more responsive to what's going on'. The success of the inflatable white elephant has already been mentioned. The No side, it was suggested, had the easier task, given the current climate of opinion, and certainly did not complicate their arguments by getting into discussions about how life in the North East could be improved if the Assembly were rejected.

One is led to the conclusion that the No campaign was the more effective. That has to be largely a subjective judgement, of course, but if the proof of the pudding is in the referendum outcome then that suggests the same conclusion. Three campaign polls give an indication of the trends in voting intentions as polling approached and the figures are as follows:

	<i>Aug 17-18</i>	<i>Sept 23-Oct 6</i>	<i>Oct 11-12</i>	<i>Result</i>
	%	%	%	%
Yes	45	28	31	22
No	30	36	54	78
DK	25	37	16	-
	(ICM)	(Wood Holmes)	(MORI)	

(Note: ICM and MORI figures are for those likely or certain to vote.

If these figures are even vaguely accurate they suggest that the Yes side were well in the lead before the campaign began. As the campaign picked up, No edged into the lead but many voters remained undecided. By the second week in October, with the percentage of undecideds declining rapidly, the No side were well in the lead. The MORI poll must have been a blow to Yes campaigners but things got even worse after that, with the last two to three weeks of campaigning seeing a massive movement to No.

Regional media commentators differed in their overall assessment of the referendum campaign. One viewed it as boring, repetitive and sterile because it revolved around a single issue – whether there should be an Assembly - which had been discussed back and forth for years, while NENC was simply ‘obstructionist’, making incessant calls for ‘a High Court Review of this and then that’. Others found it ‘exciting’, ‘absolutely fascinating’ or remarked, ‘I’ve certainly not found it quiet’. If the purpose of a campaign is to make voters aware that there is a referendum going on and to clarify and lay out the issues, then my judgement would be that this was a good campaign. The campaigners did everything that they could to arouse and maintain interest and, even if there was repetition and simplification, the issues should have been clear to the attentive public by the time they came to vote.

5. Reactions of the media and electors to the campaign

Without doubt, the referendum was a big story for the regional media in the North East. This is nicely illustrated by the front pages of the three newspapers studied on the day after the result was announced. The *Journal* had the single word ‘NO’ covering the whole page; the *Northern Echo*’s headline was ‘No – Loud and Clear’. The Middlesbrough *Evening Gazette*

added a touch of humour - their top headline was 'YES: Boro 2 Lazio 1' followed by '(but a big NO to a North-east assembly)'.

During the campaign, the *Journal* and the *Echo* reported the referendum very fully, the former making it front-page news on eight occasions and the latter on twelve. Both carried news reports and/or articles every day and both produced special supplements on the referendum, comprising eight pages in the *Journal* and 16 in the *Echo*. (The *Sunderland Echo* also produced a special four-page supplement.) In addition, as already indicated, the *Journal* sponsored debates and also commissioned a poll while the *Echo* commissioned a (more substantial) poll from MORI for the first time in its history. There was less coverage in the more down-market *Gazette* but, even so, it published letters on the referendum, carried advertisements and had articles or reports in nine issues. To put things in perspective, however, it should be remembered that the morning regional papers have relatively small circulations – about 45,000 in the case of the *Journal* and 58,000 for the *Echo* (Willings Press Guide, 2004). Coverage of the referendum in the (slightly larger circulation) evening press was much less extensive while the mass circulation national tabloids hardly mentioned it, if at all. As the *Journal's* regional affairs correspondent commented, 'A lot of our readers would be interested in the referendum anyway...but (the regional morning press) were probably missing 90% of the population'.

For that reason, television and radio had an important role to play in reporting the campaign. Tyne Tees had reports 'most nights' in their early evening regional news programme and also in their weekly magazine programme ('Round The House') on Sunday lunchtimes. In addition, a special half-hour programme was aired on a Thursday evening during the campaign and achieved a 20% audience share in the region despite being up against 'Eastenders'. There was more coverage on the BBC: 'from October onward (on 'Look North') we were running more or less an item a night' and the referendum was regularly the lead item as the campaign peaked. There was also 'a whole series of films and discussions' in the regional opt-out from the weekly 'Politics Show' and a special debate, which went out on the Sunday evening before ballot papers were delivered to voters. BBC local radio also provided plenty of coverage with lots of news packages and debate-cum-phone-in programmes. Finally, the BBC also provided a website packed with information – including details of how to vote, campaign news, pictures of the campaign and even poetry. The website was visited by 'tens of thousands' of people.

In summary, the national mass media paid little attention to the referendum campaign (until the results were announced) but it was a major event in the North East and as such received

as much coverage as could be expected in the regional morning press and on regional television and local radio.

The question arises, however, as to whether this coverage – and the efforts of the campaigning organisations - made any impression on the voters. Survey data would be required to answer this question rigorously but some impressionistic evidence was gathered in the form of reports by 11 ‘campaign monitors’ who were asked to record the campaigning that they encountered and their reactions to the campaign.

As far as the media are concerned, all monitors saw some campaign coverage on regional television and eight followed events in a regional morning paper. No one mentioned local radio. Perhaps more surprisingly, three (in outlying areas) noted coverage in local weekly papers while a few picked up snippets in the national media – the odd article in *The Guardian*, item on ‘Newsnight’ or mention in ‘World at One’. One monitor also saw a relevant comedy sketch in ‘Bremner, Bird and Fortune’. Overall, all thought that there was ample coverage of the referendum in the regional media.

Turning to campaign activities, the freepost leaflets achieved most penetration with only one monitor reporting that she did not receive the Yes leaflet while another did not mention receiving the No leaflet (and six recorded receipt of the Electoral Commission brochure). Two also reported having an ‘eye-catching’ No card delivered to their homes while one received a No letter and one a ‘Vote Yes’ flyer. There was little evidence of posters – two monitors saw one No poster each; another saw Yes posters in Newcastle and one saw an exhortation to vote in a bus shelter in Darlington. On the other hand, four people sighted boards or banners calling for a No vote in fields in the countryside. In at least one case (near Barnard Castle) these were located at busy road intersections. Other campaign activities noticed included street campaigning by Yes (in Newcastle) and by No (in Alnwick and at Hexham auction mart); the Yes banner at Unison headquarters; a Yes advertising van in Newcastle; a motor bike with a ‘Vote Yes’ trailer. One person even saw a poem about the Assembly (presumably on the BBC website). Notably, however, no one was personally canvassed.

Although the campaign monitors were a small group and probably more interested than the average voter, they were generally agreed that the campaign made an impact as the following comments suggest:

Everyone seemed aware of the campaign...(although) they were resentful of its Tyneside orientation (Darlington).

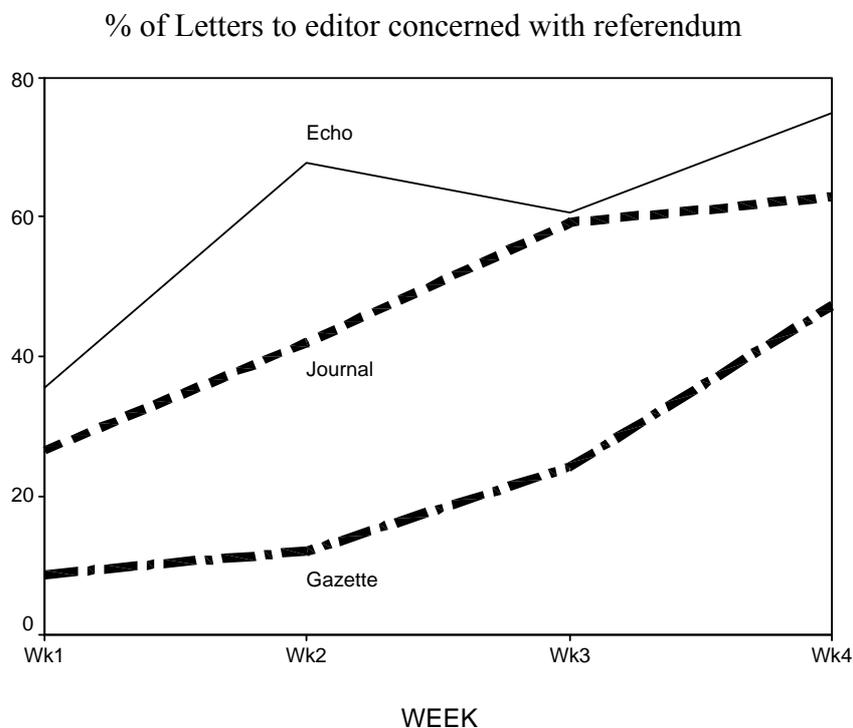
(The media) kept the debates and activities of the campaigners right in the public eye.

I found the issue of the Assembly quite frequently discussed in local hostelrys (Durham).

There was an enormous amount of coverage from both the BBC and the *Journal*.

In Newcastle it would have been difficult not to have been aware that a referendum for a Regional Assembly was taking place.

When they made evaluative comments, monitors seem to have been rather unimpressed by the Yes campaign's reliance on celebrities but were complimentary about the No freepost leaflet (described by one as 'simple but effective'). One expressed this view succinctly – 'Yes had all the personalities. The No campaign had no personalities but they had the arguments'.



Another small, if rough and ready, indicator of public involvement with the campaign is letters to the editor in regional newspapers. The political editor of the *Northern Echo* commented that

Our readers' letters column was just choca with letters. At the start of the year we were probably getting two letters a week on regional government. By the start of the campaign we were getting four or five a day, which grew to eight, nine ten a day during the campaign and that is a substantial increase.

His experience was not unique. The chart above shows the percentage of published letters to the editor in each paper concerned with the referendum. In each case there was a clear

increase over the period of the campaign. Taking the three papers together, in the first week of the campaign, 24% of 140 letters were on the referendum while in the last week (four days) the figure was 60% of 101 letters. Interestingly, of those that could be classified as either for Yes or No, the ratio consistently favoured No, rising from 68% in the first week to 77% in the last (which is remarkably close to the actual result).

6. The Local Government referendums

Four groups (organised specially for the purpose) registered to campaign in the referendums on the structure of local government in Northumberland and County Durham. These were:

Durham County Supporters Club (for a single unitary authority in Durham)

Friends of Northumberland County (for a single unitary authority in Northumberland)

Supporters of Rural Northumberland (for two unitary authorities in Northumberland)

South East Northumberland Unitary Council (for two unitary authorities in Northumberland)

Durham County Supporters Club

This group comprised mainly (but not exclusively) Labour members of Durham County Council. Finance was raised from the members themselves but also from sympathetic academics, trade unions and business people. The main campaign effort was the production and delivery of leaflets (about 165,000 copies) many of which were distributed via ‘freesheet’ newspapers in the area, others by ‘tramping the streets’. But members also used their links with town councils, parish councils, community associations and so on, as well as letters to newspapers and press releases, to spread their message. The group also organised a campaign launch in Durham City on the day that ballots went out, with people dressed in period costume, in the hope of attracting publicity.

Friends of Northumberland County

This group was consciously modelled on the equivalent group in Durham. It also comprised predominantly members of the Labour group acting in a personal capacity, with finance coming from their election fund and additional donations. Around 20,000 leaflets were distributed and half-page adverts placed in all the free weekly papers.

Supporters of Rural Northumberland (SRN)

About 25-30 people - councillors on Alnwick District Council together with friends and relatives - were involved in this campaign group. In terms of party affiliation, they were ‘a mixed bunch’ but were mainly Independents. Unlike the previous two organisations SRN

took a clear view on the Assembly question, supporting a No vote. Financed by donations, the group circulated a leaflet in the District and also placed advertisements in the local paper.

South East Northumberland Unitary Council

Despite my being unable to interview a representative of this group, it seems likely that it resembled the two ‘county’ groups described above. The responsible person was the (Labour) leader of Blyth Valley Council (on which Labour hold 34 out of 50 seats). Other evidence confirms that the group comprised Labour members of the council who provided finance and campaigned by distributing leaflets (using a distribution company) and placing a full-page advertisement in the local paper.

It should be noted that some campaigning was also undertaken by at least one District Council (Derwentside) in Durham, without registering as a participant. The Council apparently had stickers saying ‘3 instead of 1’ stuck on wheelie bins, posters visible at council premises and pens with ‘3’ printed on them.

The Attitude of the Main Referendum Campaign Organisations

The local government referendums created difficulties for the main campaign organisations. On the Yes side the problem was that their supporters – the Labour party, Liberal Democrats, trade unions – were deeply divided on the issue. One interviewee commented that ‘the infighting within the Labour party has been shocking’. Although GMB made a small donation to Durham County Supporters Club, the response on the Yes side was simply to take no view on, and play no part in, the local government referendums. On the No side the problem was that they simply did not wish the issue of local government re-organisation to arise. Most favoured leaving arrangements as they were but the Conservatives did indicate a preference against single unitary authorities in both counties. In general, however, No campaigners did not take a view. On both sides, there was some feeling that the local government referendums were something of a distraction which tended to confuse voters. Some believed that it was wrong to hold the two referendums together, a view that was strongly expressed by local government campaigners – ‘a terrible mistake because it has really confused the electorate’.

Media Coverage

Both BBC and Tyne Tees gave some coverage to the local government referendums. Tyne Tees ‘paid some attention’ in local news programmes; the BBC, while seeing it clearly as a secondary issue, nonetheless tried to ‘make sure that it didn’t get forgotten’. Similarly, both

the *Echo* and the *Journal* gave some coverage – obviously much less than was given to the Assembly vote – but journalists commented that it was ‘such a complicated thing to explain to people’ and that it was ‘a much more difficult issue’. It seems likely, however, that there was more coverage of the local government issue in the local weekly press.

7. The Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act, 2000 (PPERA)

PPERA provides the legal framework within which referendums are conducted, prescribing the registration process, designation process, details about expenditure limits and so on. In commenting on the Act, respondents generally found it difficult to distinguish between the Act itself, the activities of the Commission during the referendum and matters relating to the conduct of the referendum not covered by the Act. I have tried to separate these here, however.

The process of registering as a participant caused few problems (although one respondent thought it outrageous that in a democracy anyone should need to be ‘permitted’ to participate in a referendum). The regional TUC had some difficulty - the Act prescribes that registered trade unions can be participants but the TUC is not a registered trade union in the normal sense – but this was resolved. For individual unions and the political parties the registration process was undertaken at national level and no problems were reported. One minor party representative said that ‘it was a piece of cake’ and the small groups involved in the local government referendums also found the process straightforward. Much more disquiet (to put it mildly) was expressed about the designation process, which will be discussed in the next section.

Almost all campaigners found the requirements of PERA a burden. The larger organisations had the resources to deal with complying with the financial regulations and things were made slightly easier for smaller ones because they didn’t actually raise or spend very much money (although the BNP had a particular problem as all its bank accounts were closed during the campaign). Nonetheless, while recognising the need for some controls, almost all respondents were of the opinion that too much detail was required. The words of two very experienced election agents (one Yes and one No) illustrate this view:

The paperwork surrounding it is absolutely over the top and ridiculous...the stuff we’ve got to do now after the event....you’re getting documentation like that (points to pile) which is just ridiculous.

It’s time-consuming and over-burdensome...very bureaucratic...I understand the reason behind it but it’s a sledgehammer to crack a nut.

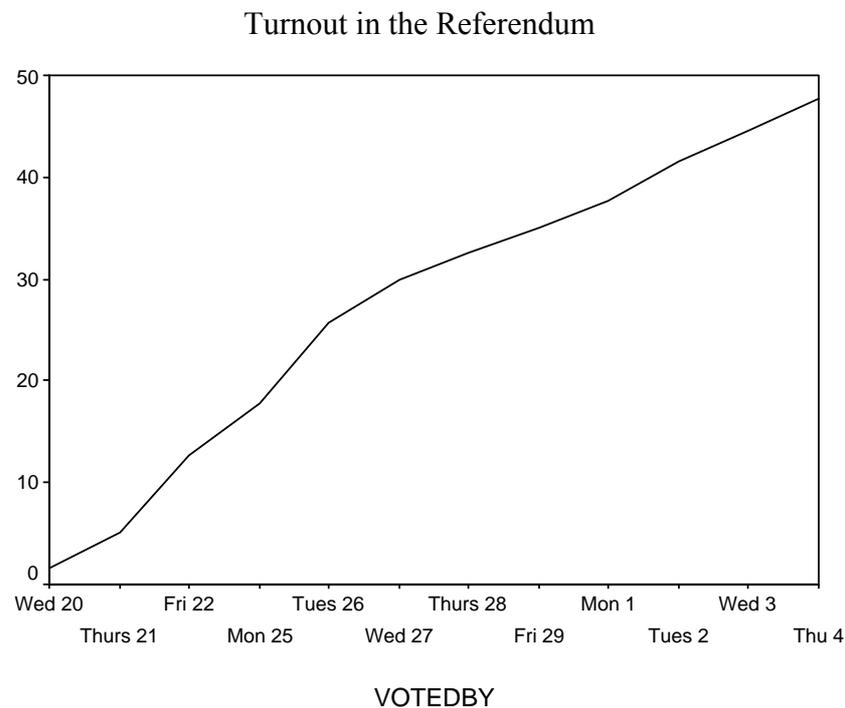
The limits on campaign expenditure caused no problems. Most respondents, indeed, treated them as a joke as the amounts involved were hugely greater than they could possibly raise and spend.

A much more fundamental criticism of PPERA was raised by NESNO campaigners. This relates to section 125 of the Act, which prohibits the publication of material by Ministers or local authorities during the ‘purdah’ period. NESNO alleged that there were breaches of this regulation by the Deputy Prime Minister and by some local authorities. It became clear, however, that it was not the Electoral Commission’s role to police this section of the Act and that no independent body is charged with enforcing it. In NESNO’s view, this renders the section ‘totally pointless’.

8. The role of the Electoral Commission and the conduct of the referendum

The Electoral Commission

Among the roles assigned to the Commission in referendums four are relevant here – registering participants, selecting the designated organisations, monitoring expenditures and encouraging voting.



As far as encouraging voting is concerned, this was done mainly through heavy advertising in the local and regional press, making a special television broadcast and circulating information leaflets. It is impossible to demonstrate any causal relationship, of course, but in the event turnout in the referendum was a highly satisfactory 47.7% - easily exceeding the regional

turnout in the European Parliament election held earlier in the year (40.8%) which also had all-postal voting. The accompanying figure shows how turnout increased over the voting period and suggests that, after a slow start, there was something of a surge at the start of the second week and then a steady increase until the end of polling. The referendum broadcast by the Commission fell in the second week (Wednesday 27th) but it is impossible to tell whether it played a significant part in the subsequent increase in turnout.

In other respects, however, in the words of one interviewee, the Commission ‘took something of an image bashing’ during the referendum. Before listing various criticisms, however, three preliminary points should be made. First, respondents had many positive things to say about the Commission’s activity. The pre-campaign briefings (notably at the Stadium of Light in Sunderland), the compliance visits, material on the website and individual members of staff were all widely praised and general comments such as ‘very helpful’, ‘very professional, I can’t fault them’, ‘a good job’, ‘supportive’ ‘as helpful as could be’, ‘they guided me through’, were very common. Second, even when people were critical, many were aware that it was actually PPERA and other regulations that were the problem, not the Commission itself – ‘it’s not their fault’, ‘their hands are tied’ and similar expressions frequently preceded criticisms. Third, I merely record the main criticisms here and that is not intended to imply any judgement about their validity or otherwise.

The designation process attracted considerable comment. The decision to designate Y4NE was uncontroversial, as it was the only applicant. On the other hand, NENC was ‘astonished’ not to have been designated (and the decision was adversely commented upon in the national press). The group’s campaign director, Mr. Herron, felt aggrieved (‘a stitch up...an establishment decision’) but some of his arguments were echoed more widely on the No side. These included the following:

- the criteria for designation were extremely vague (‘whichever of the applicants appears...to represent to the greatest extent those campaigning for that outcome’);
- the Commission had no time (or no inclination) to investigate the claims of the applicants;
- no interviews were held;
- one of the Commissioners involved had close links with an organisation that had funded the Yes campaign.

One interviewee also pointed out that although PPERA allows political parties to apply, the criteria used by the Commission effectively ruled this out.

A second area of criticism, voiced widely on both sides, relates to timing. The designation decisions were announced on 14th September, which left under five weeks for campaigning before ballot papers went out. This was less of a problem for the Yes campaign (since they were almost bound to be designated) but the uncertainty on the No side meant that money could not be committed, leaflets printed, billboard space booked and so on. In general, representatives of both sides thought that the campaign timetable was very compressed.

Both Y4NE and NESNO complained that the finance given to the designated organisations was inadequate ('a risible figure') as well as arriving late in the day. As previously mentioned, the so-called 'free' leaflet was not 'free' – printing cost £87,000 in one case - and the reported overall government expenditure on the referendum (£10.5 million) was contrasted unfavourably with the amount given to each side (£100,000) 'to prosecute a democratic argument'. The costs of modern campaigning, it was suggested, had been severely underestimated by the Commission.

The apparent remoteness of the Commission during the campaign was also frequently criticised. Key campaigners had to ring London for advice but, said one, 'you phone up and speak to some temp in the office as opposed to speaking to the person that matters...we never felt that we could get them very quickly'. Several interviewees suggested that some Commission staff ought to have been in the North East, staffing a temporary office in the region, for the duration of the campaign in order to be on hand to deal with urgent queries.

From the No side there were also accusations of bias against the Commission. These centred mainly on the list of powers that an Assembly would have, given in a Commission leaflet ('Your questions answered'). Whether or not an Assembly *would* have all of the powers listed was hotly contested by No campaigners. Some also suggested that the preamble to the referendum question on the ballot paper (which claimed that the Assembly 'would be responsible for a range of activities currently carried out mainly by central government') was misleading. In general, the No side believed that the Commission's interpretation of the White Paper followed too closely the line of the Office of the Deputy Prime Minister.

A very specific complaint registered by both Y4NE and NESNO was that the Commission took it upon itself (without warning) to release to inquirers the telephone numbers of their campaign headquarters. Both offices were apparently swamped with calls which they did not have the resources to deal with and, as a result, both offices were 'in paralysis' for some days. Finally, perhaps due to a misunderstanding of the Commission's role, many respondents were surprised at the 'hands-off' approach that was adopted during the campaign. There was a clear expectation that the Commission would act as a sort of referee of the referendum

process, showing yellow and even red cards to those who appeared to transgress the rules, or, more generally, would provide ‘essentially a running commentary’ on the campaign. There was a sense that the Commission was heavily involved in the designation and pre-campaign period and also after the event in relation to expenditure returns. In between, however, it rather hid from view.

The Conduct of the Referendum

Although not part of the Commission’s research brief, it is appropriate to make a few comments on how the referendum was conducted by the relevant authorities on the ground since these were frequently raised in interviews. Except in one respect, most people were complimentary about the Chief Counting Officer and his team at Sunderland – ‘extremely helpful’, ‘fantastic’. The exception was the announcing of the results which – because it had been decided to wait until all results were available before making any announcement - was heavily delayed by one District. Journalists were particularly frustrated as this meant that deadlines were missed. On the other hand, one media interviewee had positive comments:

They did a very professional job. It looked good. They dressed the set nicely – if you are going to be on network TV for two hours on and off and it looks bad then it reflects badly on the city. The fact that they’d lit it and had a decent screen with results made all the difference.

On another aspect of administration, the fact that arrangements for receiving, verifying and counting votes as well as for registering referendum and counting agents were devolved to the 23 Districts caused campaign organisers a great deal of work and resulted in a great deal of confusion. The problem arose partly because the relevant legislation (S.I 2004, No. 1962) makes no allowance for the appointing of sub-agents, so that referendum and counting agents had to be appointed individually for each of the Districts – ‘I’m dealing with 23 councils trying to sort out who can go where’, said one party representative. In addition, in at least some authorities arrangements to allow agents to do their job were inadequate – ‘they’re allowing one scrutineer per referendum agent and the electorate is 140,000; how can one person scrutineer that?’. Finally, the campaign organisations did not have the resources to oversee the receipt of votes since this would have involved people being present for several hours, every day for almost two weeks, in 23 separate locations.

9. Lessons for the Commission

It is not appropriate to point to lessons that may be drawn from this report for campaigners and potential campaigners in referendums. No doubt those involved in the North East referendum will have held their own *post-mortems* and drawn their own conclusions but, in any event, it is up to campaigning organisations to decide how to organise themselves, how to present themselves effectively in bids for designation and how to campaign in future referendums. These are not matters in which the Commission should be involved.

On the other hand, some lessons may be drawn for the Commission itself. It should be noted, however, that further regional referendums of the kind discussed here are unlikely in the foreseeable future so that the following points refer only to possible lessons for national referendums (such as on the EU Constitution or adoption of the euro).

On the positive side:

- Pre-campaign briefings for participants, visits by compliance staff and the provision of detailed information on the website were successful and should be continued.
- Advertising in the press and on television to encourage people to vote probably helped to produce a satisfactory turnout and is also worth repeating in future referendums.

On the other hand, critical comments made by participants suggest a number of changes in practice that might be considered.

- If possible, the decision about which organisation to designate should be made much earlier in the pre-referendum period.
- The designation process should allow time for the Commission to investigate the claims of applicants and should include interviews with those who are short-listed.
- No commissioner should be involved in the designation process who has any association with an organisation identified – even indirectly - with one side or other of the argument.
- A special unit, including senior members of staff, should be established for the duration of the campaign to respond promptly to enquiries from campaigners.
- The Commission should attempt to clarify its monitoring role during the campaign. In particular, participants (and ordinary voters) need to know where to direct complaints about the activities of other campaigners.
- The Commission should probably not attempt to provide information about the issue to be decided (whether in a leaflet or otherwise). Providing information that is entirely neutral is likely to be impossible since it will depend to some extent on interpretation, which could well be contentious.

Appendix: Persons Interviewed

Organisation	Name	Position
1. Yes4theNorthEast	Ross Forbes	Campaign Director
2. The Labour Party	Emma Thorne	Regional Organiser/ Referendum Agent
3. The Liberal Democrats	Chris Foote-Wood	Regional Deputy Chair
4. TUC (North Region)	Peter O'Brien	Regional Policy Officer
5. GMB	Julie Elliott	Regional Organiser /Referendum Agent
6. Unison	Gill Hale	Regional Secretary/Referendum Agent
7. Senior Citizens Party	Grahame Leon-Smith*	Registered contact person
8. North East Says No	Alex Ray William Norton James Frayne	Campaign Manager Referendum Agent Campaign Director
9. North East No Campaign	Neil Herron	Campaign Director
10. Conservative Party	Veronica Jones	Area Campaign Director/ Referendum Agent
11. UKIP	Stephen Allison	North Counties Organiser/Referendum Agent
12. British National Party	Kevin Scott	Regional Organiser/Referendum Agent
13. English Democrats Party	Robin Tillbrook* Michael Brown	Registered contact person and party chairman Referendum Agent
14. County Durham Council Supporters Club	John Walker Don Ross	Chair/Referendum Agent Deputy Leader of Council
15. Friends of Northumb- erland County	Peter Hillman	Chair/Referendum Agent
16. Supporters of Rural Northumberland	David Wright	Chair/Registered contact person
17. Tyne-Tees Television	Mark Davenport	News Editor
18. BBC North East	Michael Wilde	Editor of Political Programmes
19. <i>The Journal</i> (Newcastle)	Ross Smith	Regional Affairs Correspondent
20. <i>Northern Echo</i>	Chris Lloyd	Political Editor

Those asterisked were interviewed by telephone. All interviews were conducted by David Denver.