



Northern
Ireland
Office

Forms for Elections in Northern Ireland

April 2014

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Foreword by the Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP, Minister of State for Northern Ireland

Forms for elections are the primary way in which voters receive information about elections and are encouraged to participate in them. Regrettably, some forms have become outdated and research has shown that voters find some of the language used hard to understand.

As part of our efforts to promote greater participation in elections across the United Kingdom, the Government is committed to making the process of voting as accessible as possible, while maintaining the security of the poll.

In recent years there have been moves to modernise the appearance of voter-facing forms at some new polls such as the 2012 police and crime commissioner elections and the 2011 referendum on the parliamentary voting system. In 2013 the Government brought forward legislation to introduce new forms for some elections in Great Britain.

I believe it is important that we consider whether similar changes in Northern Ireland would assist voters and help promote greater participation in elections. This paper sets out proposals for similar changes to a number of forms for use at elections in Northern Ireland to update their appearance and make them more accessible.

I would encourage all those with an interest to comment on the proposed forms.

**Rt Hon Andrew Robathan MP
Minister of State for Northern Ireland
April 2014**

1: BACKGROUND

1.1 To support work on modernising the electoral system the Government is undertaking an upgrade of voter-facing forms and notices used in a number of elections in the United Kingdom. There has already been consultation in relation to Great Britain and the Government is in the process of bringing forward legislation to introduce changes to forms used there. Changes to the ballot paper for UK Parliamentary elections will apply directly to Northern Ireland. However, a consultation in respect of other Northern Ireland forms is now being conducted separately. It is proposed that the new form designs will first be used for the UK Parliamentary elections in May 2015 (they will not be used for elections in 2014).

1.2 As part of reviewing the forms for Great Britain, the Government commissioned user-testing of prototype designs by a cross-section of the general public. The language, layout and design features were considered during user-testing, including examination of areas such as ease of use, consistency of style/tone, structure, font/size of text and clarity of content. Feedback from the user-testing has been considered when developing the forms included in this consultation for Northern Ireland. The Electoral Commission report, "Making your Mark", also provided guidance for improving form design.

1.3 The Government believes that there is value in using the same or similar forms for all elections in Northern Ireland, to help avoid voter confusion, by ensuring that information is provided in a consistent and recognisable format. This is particularly important when two polls are combined on the same day.

1.4 It is also the Government's view that voter-facing forms should be as similar as possible in all parts of the UK participating in an election, taking into account local differences in legislation. This helps to ensure the election is conducted fairly, for example by providing all electors with the same information, and can also increase a sense of shared participation.

1.5 Where possible, the forms proposed in this document are therefore consistent with designs used elsewhere in the UK and will apply to a number of elections. The elections for which the new forms will apply are listed in each section.

1.6 This consultation seeks views on the Government's proposed changes to the following voter-facing forms for elections in Northern Ireland:

- Ballot papers (excluding UK Parliamentary elections, which have already been changed)
- Guidance for voters in voting (excluding UK Parliamentary elections)
- Poll cards (including postal and proxy poll cards)
- Declaration of identity
- Proxy paper
- Certificate of employment
- Declaration made by companion of voter with disabilities (excluding UK Parliamentary elections)

1.7 Comments are welcome on the overall approach taken and on each individual form.

1.8 The changes already made to forms for European Parliamentary elections in Great Britain can be seen in the Schedule to the European Parliamentary Elections (Amendment) Regulations 2013:

<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/uksi/2013/2876/schedule/1/made>.

2: BALLOT PAPERS

2.1 The Government has laid draft legislation before Parliament¹ which will amend the ballot paper for UK Parliamentary elections. This new design applies to all UK Parliamentary elections held across the United Kingdom, including in Northern Ireland. Therefore this consultation is only seeking views on the design of ballot papers for European Parliamentary, Northern Ireland Assembly and local elections. All of these elections use the single transferable vote (STV) system and it is our intention that the ballot paper should be as similar as possible for each election. For the purposes of this consultation, the ballot paper presented is for European Parliamentary elections.

2.2 The proposed changes, particularly to font, format and layout, are similar to changes made to the ballot paper for UK Parliamentary elections.

2.3 The main changes made to the previous ballot paper design are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information, for example candidate names and political parties;
- b. Addition of a heading stating the name of the election, to help electors distinguish between ballot papers when polls are combined;
- c. More detailed instructions on how electors should cast their vote at the top of the ballot paper;
- d. Moving the list of candidates from the right-hand side of the paper to the left-hand side to ensure consistency with other elections and make the paper easier to read; and
- e. Introduction of defined voting boxes to help make clear the space in which electors should mark their preferences.

2.4 The Government proposes the following design for ballot papers (the names and addresses on the ballot paper are for illustrative purposes only):

¹ The draft Representation of the People (Ballot Paper) Regulations 2013 are available at <http://www.legislation.gov.uk/ukdsi/2013/9780111101599>.

Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland Region

Number the candidates in order of preference, putting in the box beside your first preference, in the box beside your second preference and so on. You may show your preference for as many or as few candidates as you wish.

BITTERN, Richard
5 Down Street, Bangor, Co. Down
Democratic Unionist Party



DIPPER, Joanna
9 Mourne View, Donaghadee, Co. Down
Independent

DIPPER, Martin
8 Magilligan Drive, Portaferry, Co. Down
SDLP (Social Democratic and Labour Party)



FINCH, John
29 Gilford Place, Millisle, Co. Down
Sinn Fein



KITE, Julie
Glen Cottage, Banbridge, Co. Down
Independent

LINNET, Harry
7 Gortin Mansions, Dromara, Co. Down
Ulster Unionist Party



ROBIN, David
3 Strangford Road, Killinchy, Co. Down
Independent

SPARROW, Anne
41 Devenish Dive, Ballynahinch, Co. Down
Independent

SWALLOW, Peter
3 Mourne View, Bangor, Co. Down
Independent

SWIFT, Lee
11 Moira Terrace, Newry, Co. Down
Independent

The Government proposes that the ballot papers for European Parliamentary, Assembly and local elections in Northern Ireland should be amended to bring them into line with the ballot paper design for UK Parliamentary elections, modernise the design and make information clearer.

Question 1: Do the proposed design changes improve the ballot paper?

Question 2: Are the instructions to voters at the top of the ballot paper clear?

Question 3: Do the instructions to voters at the top of the ballot paper contain too much or too little information?

Question 4: Should the list of candidates be moved to the left-hand side of the ballot paper?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

3: GUIDANCE FOR VOTERS IN VOTING

3.1 The guidance for voters in voting is the notice that is required by law to be displayed inside and outside every polling station to explain to electors how to cast their vote in the election.

3.2 The guidance for voters in voting is set out in primary legislation for UK Parliamentary elections and so the content of the guidance cannot be amended for Parliamentary elections without primary legislation. This consultation is seeking views in relation to the guidance for voters for European Parliamentary, Northern Ireland Assembly and local elections. We would also welcome views on whether the formatting and layout of the form for UK Parliamentary elections should be adapted to be consistent with the new legislative forms for other elections.

3.3 The main changes made to the previous guidance for voters in voting are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and the use of bold text to highlight important information; and
- b. Addition of pictures beside each step of the numbered guidance to illustrate more clearly to electors what they are required to do.

3.4 The Government proposes the following design for the guidance for voters:

How to vote at this election

1

Go to the desk, tell the staff your name and address and show your approved form of photographic identification.

They will give you your ballot paper.



2

Take your ballot paper to a voting booth.



3

Read the instructions in the booth and mark your ballot paper.



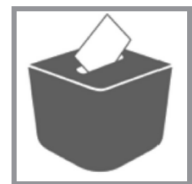
4

When you have marked your ballot paper, fold it so that nobody can see how you have voted.



5

Put your folded ballot paper into the ballot box.



(!) Voting is secret. Do not let anyone see how you have voted.

i If you make a mistake or need help, just ask the staff.

The Government proposes that the guidance for voters in voting to be displayed in polling stations for European Parliamentary, Assembly and local elections in Northern Ireland should be amended to modernise the design and assist electors by making information clearer and adding picture images.

Question 5: Does this guidance provide sufficient information to make it clear to electors how to vote?

Question 6: Do the pictures assist understanding of the guidance?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

4: POLL CARDS

4.1 The changes to poll cards will be applied to four elections in Northern Ireland: UK Parliamentary, European Parliamentary, Northern Ireland Assembly and local council elections. Each poll card will have a title making clear which election it relates to. For the purposes of this consultation, the poll cards presented are those for European Parliamentary elections, but the poll cards will be as similar as possible for the other three elections.

4.2 There are four types of poll cards that will be used at elections in Northern Ireland:

- Poll cards
- Postal poll cards
- Proxy poll cards
- Proxy postal poll cards

Poll cards

4.3 Poll cards are issued by the Chief Electoral Officer in advance of an election to all electors who have registered to vote in person at a polling station. Separate poll cards are issued to electors who have registered to vote by post or by proxy (see sections 4.7 to 4.17 below).

4.4 The purpose of the poll card is to provide electors with information about the election and how to vote, including details of the date and time of the election and where the elector should go to cast their vote. The poll card also explains to electors what voting offences exist and alternative options for voting if they are unable to go to the polling station on election day.

- 4.5 The main changes made to the previous poll card design are:
- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information;
 - b. Introduction of boxes around text to make the information clearer and easy to read by grouping related information together in a single box;
 - c. Changing “polling hours” to “voting hours” to aid understanding;
 - d. Addition of helpline details on the front of the card to highlight where electors can find assistance; and
 - e. Removal of voting instructions from the back of the poll card to reduce the volume of information included on the back of the card, as this information is provided to electors elsewhere.
- 4.6 The Government proposes the following design for poll cards:

Front of card

Poll card
Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland Region
Date of election [Day] [Date] [Name of the Month] [Year]

Voting information	
Polling day	
Voting hours	
Your polling station will be	

Your details: <i>[Elector's name and qualifying address details here]</i> Number on register:

You do not need to take this card with you in order to vote.

Remember that you will not be able to vote unless you show an approved form of photographic identification.

[Insert helpline and other details including website]

Please turn over

Back of card

<i>This space for map or other information such as helpline and website details</i>

It is an offence to:

- vote more than once at this election, unless you are voting on your own behalf and as a proxy for another person
- vote as some other person (living, dead or fictitious)
- vote if you know that by law you are not allowed to vote

<i>i</i> If you need any help or to find out if your polling station is accessible, please contact us. <i>[Returning Officer to add contact details including website if appropriate]</i>
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If undelivered return to:

[Insert return address]

If you are away or cannot go to the polling station on [day] [date of poll] you can do one of the following:

- Apply to vote by post. Completed applications must reach us **before 5pm on [day] [date of deadline]**. If you are given a postal vote, you will not be able to vote in person at this election.

OR

- Apply to vote by proxy (this means someone else can vote on your behalf). Completed applications must reach us **before 5pm on [day] [date of deadline]**. If you appoint a proxy, you can vote if you wish, but only if your proxy has not already voted on your behalf and has not got a postal vote for you.

If after 5pm on [day] [date of deadline] you are unable to vote in person because you:

- **Have a medical emergency, or**
- **Learn you cannot go to the polling station because of work reasons**

You can apply to vote by proxy. Completed applications must reach us **before 5pm [day] [date of deadline]**. To find out how to apply, call the helpline immediately.

The Returning Officer issued this card.

Postal poll cards

4.7 Postal poll cards have not previously been used in Northern Ireland, although they have been used in Great Britain since 2007. At present, postal voters for UK Parliamentary elections and Northern Ireland Assembly elections receive a normal poll card and postal voters in local elections in Northern Ireland receive no poll card. This can be confusing for voters, as they receive either no appropriate information about the poll or information that can be misleading. Postal poll cards and postal proxy poll cards will be introduced in Northern Ireland by the Anonymous Registration (Northern Ireland) Order 2014, which was laid before Parliament on 24 February 2014, and subsequent secondary legislation on anonymous registration. We propose to amend these forms, consistently with the amendments to poll cards.

4.8 Postal poll cards will be issued by the Chief Electoral Officer to all electors who have applied and are eligible for a postal vote in Northern Ireland². The purpose of the postal poll card is to explain to electors that they will receive a postal vote for the upcoming election, give information on how to cast their postal vote, including what assistance is available, and detail voting offences.

4.9 The Government proposes the following design for postal poll cards:

² The requirements for an absent vote in Northern Ireland are specified in the rules for each election:
The European Parliamentary Elections (Northern Ireland) Regulations 2004
The Electoral Law Act (Northern Ireland) 1962
The Representation of the People Act 1983

Front of card

Postal poll card
Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland Region
Date of election [Day] [Date] [Name of the Month] [Year]

Voting information
We will send your postal vote around [name of day] [date] [year] *[addressed to:]
<i>*[Elector's name and address]</i>
<i>*Returning Officer to omit where postal poll card sent to an anonymous elector. Postal poll card to an anonymous elector must be delivered in a sealed envelope.</i>

Please turn over

Your details:

** [Elector's name and qualifying address details here]*

**Returning Officer to omit where postal poll card sent to an anonymous elector. Postal poll card to an anonymous elector must be delivered in a sealed envelope*

Number on register:

Your postal vote

- You will receive a postal vote for this election because you successfully applied to vote by post.
- You will not be able to vote in a polling station.
- **If you have not received your postal vote by [day] [date] [name of month] call [insert helpline and other details including website]**

Back of card

How to vote
1. When you receive your postal vote, read the instructions carefully.
2. Your postal vote includes your ballot paper and a declaration of identity.
3. Complete the ballot paper. Complete the declaration of identity in the presence of a witness who must also sign the form adding their name and address.
4. We need to receive your postal vote by 10pm on [day/date of poll] . Postal voting papers cannot be accepted at polling stations.

i If you need information in another format, please call our helpline below.

i If you need help to vote, you can ask someone you know or get independent help by calling our helpline:

[Insert helpline and other details including website]

If you make a mistake:

- Please phone the helpline immediately.
- We can only issue a replacement postal vote **before 5pm on [day/date of deadline]**.

If you would rather vote in person, or ask someone else to vote on your behalf, you must cancel your postal vote **before 5pm on [day/date of deadline]**. Note that if you have an anonymous entry on the register you will not be able to vote in person, but you can ask someone else to vote by post on your behalf. For more information, please call the helpline.

It is an offence to:

- vote by post as some other person (living, dead or fictitious)
- vote more than once at this election, unless you are voting on your own behalf and as a proxy for another person
- supply your postal ballot paper to another person for their use or interfere with another voter's ballot paper
- vote by post if you know that by law you are not entitled to vote

The Returning Officer issued this card.

If undelivered return to:

[Insert return address]

Proxy poll cards

4.10 Proxy poll cards are issued by the Chief Electoral Officer to electors who are voting as a proxy (on behalf of someone else) in person at a polling station.

4.11 The purpose of the proxy poll card is to confirm to an elector that they have been nominated to vote as a proxy for someone else and provide that person's details alongside information on the date and time of the election and where the elector should go to cast their vote. The proxy poll card gives the elector instructions on how to vote as a proxy at a polling station and alternative voting options if they can't get to the polling station on election day. It also lists the relevant voting offences.

4.12 The main changes made to the proxy poll card are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information;
- b. Introduction of boxes around text to make the information clearer and easy to read by grouping related information together in a single box;
- c. Replacement of "the poll will be open from" with "voting hours" to aid understanding and maintain consistency with other poll cards;
- d. Addition of helpline details on the front of the card to highlight where electors can find assistance;
- e. Clearer distinction between the proxy's details (now "your details") and the elector's details (now "for this election you are proxy for") to assist understanding;
- f. Addition of numbered instructions for the procedure of how to vote as a proxy including how the proxy obtains a ballot paper in the polling station and what they are required to do to cast a vote; and
- g. Removal of voting instructions from the back of the poll card to reduce the volume of information included on the back of the card as this information is provided to electors elsewhere.

4.13 The Government proposes the following design for proxy poll cards:

Front of card

Proxy poll card
Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland Region
Date of election [Day] [Date] [Name of the Month] [Year]

Voting information	
Polling day	
Voting hours	
Your polling station will be	

Please turn over

Your details:

[Proxy's name and qualifying address details here]

Number on register:

You will receive a proxy vote

The person named on the back of this card has appointed you as a proxy to vote on their behalf at this election.

You do not need to take this card with you to vote.

Remember that you will not be able to vote unless you show an approved form of photographic identification.

[Insert helpline and other details including website]

Back of card

For this election you are proxy for:

[Elector's name

Elector's address

Elector's number on register]

The person you are proxy for can vote themselves if they wish – but only if you have not already voted on their behalf.

This space for map or other information such as helpline and website details



If you need any help or to find out if your polling station is accessible, please contact us.

[Returning Officer to add contact details including website if appropriate]

How to vote as a proxy

1. At the polling station, tell the staff that you are a proxy for the person named above. Show your approved form of photographic identification. They will give you that person's ballot paper.

2. Go to one of the voting booths.

3. Follow the instructions on how to mark the ballot paper.

4. Fold the ballot paper and put in the ballot box.

If you need any help, just ask the staff.

If you are away or cannot go to the polling station on [day] [date of poll]

- You can apply to vote by post. The deadline for completed applications is **5pm on [day] [date of deadline]**.
- If you are given a postal vote, you or the person you are proxy for will not be able to vote in person at this election.
- **To find out how to apply, please call us on [insert helpline number or other contact details].**

It is an offence to:

- vote as a proxy as some other person (living, dead or fictitious)
- vote more than once at this election, unless you are voting on your own behalf and as a proxy for another person
- vote as a proxy at this election for more than two people, unless you are their spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild
- vote as a proxy for someone if you know that by law either you or they are not allowed to vote

The Returning Officer issued this card.

If undelivered return to:

[insert return address]

Proxy postal poll cards

4.14 As with postal poll cards, proxy postal poll cards have not previously been used in Northern Ireland but are being introduced for the same reasons (see section 4.7 above).

4.15 Proxy postal poll cards will be issued by the Chief Electoral Officer to electors who are voting as a proxy (on behalf of someone else) and have applied and are eligible to vote by post (the same requirements for an absent vote apply to proxy voters).

4.16 The purpose of the proxy postal poll card is to confirm to electors that they have been nominated to vote as a proxy for someone else and that they will receive a postal vote to cast that person's vote. The card explains to proxies how to cast the postal vote, what assistance is available and details voting offences.

4.17 The Government proposes the following design for proxy postal poll cards:

Front of card

Proxy postal poll card
Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland Region
Date of election [Day] [Date] [Name of the Month] [Year]

Voting information
We will send your postal vote around [name of day] [date] [year] *[addressed to:]
<i>*[Proxy's name and qualifying address details here]</i>
<i>*Returning Officer to omit where postal poll card sent to the proxy of an anonymous elector. Postal poll card to proxy of an anonymous elector must be delivered in a sealed envelope.</i>

Please turn over

Back of card

For this election you are proxy for:

**[(Elector's name)*

(Elector's address)

(Elector's number on register)]

[the person with this elector number: (Insert elector's number on register)].

**If anonymous elector omit the words in the first set of square brackets, if not omit the words in the second set of square brackets.*

How to vote

1. When you receive your postal vote, read the instructions carefully.
2. Your postal vote includes your ballot paper and a declaration of identity.
3. Complete the ballot paper. Complete the declaration of identity in the presence of a witness who must also sign the form adding their name and address. If you are voting on behalf of someone registered anonymously your witness should not provide his or her name and address. It is important that both you and your witness sign the declaration.
4. We need to receive your postal vote by **10pm on [day/date of poll]**. Postal voting papers cannot be accepted at polling stations.

i **If you need information in another format, please call our helpline below.**

i **If you need help to vote, you can ask someone you know or get independent help by calling our helpline:**
[Insert helpline and other details including website]

Voting as a proxy

** [The person named on the back of this card] [Another person] has appointed you as a proxy to vote on their behalf at this election.

** *If sent to the proxy of an anonymous elector omit the words in the first set of brackets, if not omit the words in the second set of brackets.*

Your postal vote

- You will receive a postal vote for this election because you successfully applied to vote by post.
- You will not be able to vote as a proxy in a polling station.
- **If you have not received your postal vote by [day] [date] [name of month] call [insert helpline number].**

If you make a mistake:

- Please phone the helpline immediately.
- We can only issue a replacement postal vote **before 5pm on [day/date of deadline]**.

If you would rather vote in person, you must cancel your postal vote **before 5pm on [day/date of deadline]**. For more information, please call the helpline.

It is an offence to:

- vote as a proxy as some other person (living, dead or fictitious)
- supply your postal ballot paper to another person for their use or interfere with another voter's ballot paper
- vote more than once at this election, unless you are voting on your own behalf and as a proxy for another person
- vote as a proxy at this election for more than two people, unless you are their spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild
- vote as a proxy for someone if you know that by law either you or they are not allowed to vote

The Returning Officer issued this card.

If undelivered return to:

[insert return address]

The Government proposes that the poll cards (poll card, postal poll card, proxy poll card and proxy postal poll card) issued to electors in Northern Ireland should be amended to modernise the design and make information clearer.

Question 7: Is the new layout of poll cards clear and easy to understand?

Question 8: Is there any further information which should be included on the poll cards?

Question 9: Is there any information included which should not be retained on the poll cards?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

5: DECLARATION OF IDENTITY

5.1 The declaration of identity is issued by the Chief Electoral Officer to all electors who receive a postal vote. Its purpose is to allow the Chief Electoral Officer to verify that the correct person has voted. The declaration must be completed in the presence of a witness and returned alongside the ballot paper for the vote to be counted. The form requires electors to provide their date of birth and signature, which the Chief Electoral Officer checks against his records for security. A witness must also sign the form and provide their name and address. The witness of the declaration of identity should not see how the elector has voted.

5.2 The changes proposed for the declaration of identity will be applied to four elections in Northern Ireland: UK Parliamentary, European Parliamentary, Assembly and local council elections. Each declaration of identity will have a title stating the name of the election. For the purposes of this consultation, the declaration of identity presented is that for European Parliamentary elections, but the form for other elections will be as similar as possible.

5.3 The main changes made to the previous declaration of identity are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information;
- b. Introduction of boxes around text to make the information clearer and easy to read by grouping related information together in a single box; and
- c. Inclusion of helpline information on the form to highlight where electors can find assistance.

5.4 The Government proposes the following design for the declaration of identity:

Front of statement

Declaration of identity

Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland region

Date of election [day] [date] [month] [year]

Important – you must fill in and return this declaration of identity with your completed ballot paper for it to be counted.

Please read the instructions carefully.

*Name _____ Ballot paper number _____

** Returning Officer to omit name where sent to an anonymous elector*

(!) Check that the number on the back of your ballot paper matches the number shown above. If these do not match, call us **immediately** on (*insert helpline number*).

I am the person the ballot paper numbered above was sent to.

My Date of Birth is:

--	--

Day

--	--

Month

--	--	--	--

Year

***My Signature is:**

**Returning Officer to omit where elector has been granted a waiver.*

--

We will check this information against our records for security.

The voter, who is personally known to me, has signed this declaration in my presence.

Witness signature _____

*** Name of witness (PRINT CLEARLY IN CAPITAL LETTERS)**

*** Address of witness (PRINT CLEARLY IN CAPITAL LETTERS)**

**Returning Officer to omit where sent to an anonymous elector.*

Returning Officer to add pictorial guidance as appropriate.



Instructions for voting by post

Please read through carefully. If you need help, please call us on [insert helpline number]

1. For your vote to be counted, you must fill in, in the presence of a witness, and return this declaration of identity with your ballot paper.
2. Make sure you and your witness have filled in all the information on this declaration of identity.
3. On the ballot paper, number the candidates in order of preference
Putting “1” against your first choice,
“2” against your second choice and so on.
4. You should not put the same number against more than one candidate.
5. You may number as many or as few candidates as you wish.
6. We must receive your postal vote, together with the declaration of identity, in the envelope supplied by **10pm on [day] [date of poll]**.
7. After receiving this postal vote, you cannot vote in person at a polling station in this election.



Getting Help

- If you need help to vote, you can ask someone you know or get independent help by calling the helpline on [insert helpline number]. The person helping you must not tell anyone how you voted.
- Please call the helpline if you require copies of this form or guidance in Braille or languages other than English.
- If you make a mistake you can get a replacement. Call us immediately as **we can only issue a replacement before 5pm on [day] [date] [month]**.

Electoral fraud is a crime.

The Returning Officer issued this statement.

Returning Officer to add pictorial guidance as appropriate.

The Government proposes that the declaration of identity used by postal voters at elections in Northern Ireland should be updated.

Question 10: Does the new layout of the declaration of identity make clear what information must be provided?

Question 11: Do the instructions for voting by post provide sufficient information?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

6: PROXY PAPER

6.1 Proxy papers are issued by the Chief Electoral Officer to electors to confirm that he has granted an application for them to vote as a proxy on behalf of someone else. The proxy paper informs the elector of the name of the person for whom they are a proxy and whether they are able to vote as a proxy for a particular election or for an indefinite period.

6.2 The changes suggested to the proxy paper will be applied to four elections in Northern Ireland: UK Parliamentary, European Parliamentary, Assembly and local council elections. Each proxy paper will have a title making clear which election the form is for. For the purposes of this consultation, the proxy paper presented is that for European Parliamentary elections, but the form for other elections will be as similar as possible.

6.3 The main changes made to the previous proxy paper are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information; and
- b. Introduction of boxes around text to make the information clearer and easy to read, by grouping related information together in a single box.

6.4 The Government proposes the following design for the proxy paper:

Front of paper

Proxy paper	
Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland region	
Name of Proxy	
Address of Proxy	
<p>I wish to inform you that you are hereby appointed as proxy for _____ (name of elector)</p> <p>*[who is qualified to be registered at] (Qualifying address) _____</p> <p>to vote for them at *[Local Council/Parliamentary/European Parliamentary/Assembly] elections.</p> <p>*[This proxy appointment is not valid until] _____</p> <p>Signature _____ (Electoral Registration Officer)</p> <p>Date _____</p> <p><i>* Delete whichever is inappropriate</i></p>	

Back of paper

You will receive a proxy vote

1. This proxy paper gives you the right to vote as a proxy on behalf of the elector who is named on the front of this paper.
2. You may not vote as proxy at the same election for more than two electors, unless you are their spouse, civil partner, parent, grandparent, brother, sister, child or grandchild.
3. You may vote as proxy at the polling station allotted to the elector on whose behalf you are appointed. Shortly before polling day you will be sent a proxy poll card telling you where the polling station is. You do not need to take either the proxy poll card or this proxy paper with you to vote.
4. If you cannot vote in person at the polling station, you should consult the electoral registration officer about voting by post.

[Insert helpline/contact details]

The Government proposes that the proxy paper used at elections in Northern Ireland by electors who have been appointed as a proxy to vote on behalf of another elector should be updated.

Question 12: Does the proxy paper explain clearly what being a proxy for someone will involve?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

7: CERTIFICATE OF EMPLOYMENT

7.1 Certificates of employment are for use by specific members of the Police Service of Northern Ireland (PSNI) and staff (such as local council staff) carrying out duties on behalf of the Returning Officer. The certificates confirm that an individual will be unable to attend to vote in person at their own polling station on election day because they are undertaking duties in connection with the election. When completed and appropriately authorised, the certificate entitles the elector to vote at any polling station in the appropriate electoral area for the election on production of the certificate.

7.2 The changes suggested to the certificate of employment will be applied to four elections in Northern Ireland: UK Parliamentary, European Parliamentary, Assembly and local council elections. Each certificate of employment will have a title making clear which election the form applies to. For the purposes of this consultation, the certificate of employment presented is that for European Parliamentary elections, but the form for the other elections will be as similar as possible.

7.3 The main changes made to the previous certificate of employment are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information; and
- b. Introduction of boxes around text to make the information clearer and easy to read by grouping related information together in a single box.

7.4 The Government proposes the following design for the certificate of employment:

Certificate of employment

Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland region

Date of election [day] [date] [month] [year]

The person named below is entitled to vote at any polling station in the Northern Ireland region on production and surrender of this certificate to the Presiding Officer.

I certify that _____ (name of elector)

who is numbered* _____ in the register of electors for Northern Ireland region cannot reasonably be expected to go in person to the polling station allotted to them at this election by reason of his/her employment on the above date for a purpose connected with this election:

- as a constable**
- by me (Only applies to Returning Officer's staff)**

Signature _____ Returning Officer/Police Officer (*Inspector or above*)**

Date _____

* The elector's number can be found on the poll card which was sent to them shortly after the election was announced, or can be checked by contacting the Electoral Registration Officer.

** Person completing the form to delete whichever does not apply.

The Government proposes that the certificate of employment used at elections in Northern Ireland by certain individuals who are unable to attend their polling station because they are employed to undertake duties in connection with the election should be updated.

Question 13: Is the information required for the certificate of employment clear?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

8: DECLARATION MADE BY COMPANION OF VOTER WITH DISABILITIES

8.1 Electors may apply to the Presiding Officer to be allowed, on the grounds of blindness or other disability, or inability to read, to vote with the assistance of another person, known as a companion. The companion must complete and sign a declaration to confirm: (a) either that they are entitled to vote as an elector in the election, or that they are the spouse, civil partner, parent, brother, sister, child of the voter with disabilities; and (b) that they have not previously assisted more than one voter with disabilities at the election. The Presiding Officer must witness the completion of the declaration and then attest and retain the form.

8.2 The declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities is set out in primary legislation for UK Parliamentary elections and therefore cannot be amended without primary legislation. So this consultation is only seeking views on any changes to the substance of the declaration for European Parliamentary, Northern Ireland Assembly and local elections. We will also consider whether the formatting and layout of the form for UK Parliamentary elections should be adapted in practice to be consistent with the new legislative forms for other elections. For the purposes of this consultation, the declaration presented is that for European Parliamentary elections.

8.3 The key changes made to the previous declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities are:

- a. Clearer font, layout and use of bold text to highlight important information; and
- b. Introduction of boxes around text to make the information clearer and easy to read by grouping related information together in a single box.

8.4 The Government proposes the following design for the declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities:

Declaration for the companion of a voter with disabilities

Election of Members of the European Parliament for the Northern Ireland region

Date of election [day] [date] [month] [year]
--

A voter with disabilities is a voter who has made a declaration that he or she is so incapacitated by his or her blindness or other disability, or by his or her inability to read, as to be unable to vote in this election without assistance.
--

Part 1 To be completed by the voter's companion
--

Companion name	
----------------	--

Companion address	
-------------------	--

Elector name	
--------------	--

Elector number	
----------------	--

[Only for use if the disabled elector is acting as a proxy] Elector is acting as proxy for	
--	--

I have been requested to assist the elector named above to record their vote at this election. I declare that:

<ul style="list-style-type: none">I am entitled to vote as an elector at this election
--

Or

<ul style="list-style-type: none">I am the *spouse/*civil partner/*parent/*brother/*sister/*child of the voter with disabilities and am 18 years of age or over

<i>* Please delete whichever does not apply</i>

And

<ul style="list-style-type: none">I have not previously assisted more than one other voter with disabilities at the election. If I have assisted one other voter their name and address is:

[Complete if appropriate] Name and address of other person assisted	
---	--

NOTE – It is a criminal offence to communicate at any time to any person any information as to the way in which the voter intends to vote or has voted.
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Companion signature		Date	
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Part 2 To be completed by the Presiding Officer
--

I, the undersigned, being the Presiding Officer for:
--

Polling station			
-----------------	--	--	--

Hereby certify that the above declaration was signed in my presence	Presiding Officer signature		
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Date		Time (exact)	
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The Government proposes that the declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities for European Parliamentary, Assembly and local elections in Northern Ireland should be updated.

Question 14: Does the layout of the declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities make clear what information is required?

Please give reasons for your answer, providing evidence where possible.

9: SUMMARY OF CONSULTATION QUESTIONS

9.1 The Government proposes that the following forms for elections in Northern Ireland should be amended:

- Ballot papers for European Parliamentary, Assembly and local elections
- Guidance for voters in voting to be displayed in polling stations for European Parliamentary, Assembly and local elections
- Poll cards for all elections
- The declaration of identity used by postal voters for all elections
- The proxy paper sent to electors who have been appointed as a proxy to vote on behalf of another elector for all elections
- The certificate of employment used by certain individuals who are unable to attend their polling station because they are employed to undertake duties in connection with the election for all elections
- The declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities for European Parliamentary, Assembly and local elections

Question 1: Do the proposed design changes improve the ballot paper?

Question 2: Are the instructions to voters at the top of the ballot paper clear?

Question 3: Do the instructions to voters at the top of the ballot paper contain too much or too little information?

Question 4: Should the list of candidates be moved to the left-hand side of the ballot paper?

Question 5: Does the guidance for voters in voting provide sufficient information to make it clear to voters how to vote?

Question 6: Do the pictures aid understanding of the guidance for voters in voting?

Question 7: Is the new layout of poll cards clear and easy to understand?

Question 8: Is there any further information which should be included on the poll cards?

Question 9: Is there any information included which should not be retained on the poll cards?

Question 10: Does the new layout of the declaration of identity make clear what information is required to be provided?

Question 11: Do the instructions for voting by post provide sufficient information?

Question 12: Does the proxy paper explain clearly what being a proxy for someone will involve?

Question 13: Is the information required for the certificate of employment clear?

Question 14: Does the layout of the declaration made by the companion of a voter with disabilities make clear what information is required?

10: RESPONDING TO THIS CONSULTATION

10.1 This consultation will run for six weeks. This timescale is to ensure that the necessary legislation can be brought forward and complete its parliamentary process six months before the Parliamentary election in 2015. Responses are requested by **Friday 13 June 2014**. Comments on the proposals should be e-mailed to electionsunit@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk. Responses can also be faxed to 020 7210 6550 or sent by post to:

Constitutional Policy Team
Northern Ireland Office
1 Horse Guards Road
LONDON
SW1A 2HQ

Please call 020 7210 6545 for queries in relation to this consultation. The NIO textphone number is 02890 527668.

10.2 This consultation document is available on the gov.uk website under www.gov.uk/nio. Printed copies of this consultation document may be obtained free of charge from the above address. You may make additional copies of this document without seeking permission. This document can also be made available on request in different formats, for individuals with particular needs.

10.3 If you are responding on behalf of a group or organisation please make this clear. The NIO is committed to publishing a list of those organisations that comment on these proposals and to making available, to anyone who asks for it, a copy of the comments and our response to them. **If you do not wish your comments to be published in this way, you must make this clear in any response you submit.**

10.4 If you have any concerns or complaints about the consultation process you should contact the NIO's consultation co-ordinator on 028 90765497, or e-mail corporategovernance@nio.x.gsi.gov.uk or by post:

Consultation Co-ordinator
Corporate Governance Unit
Northern Ireland Office
1 Horse Guards Road
LONDON
SW1A 2HQ

11: RESPONSES: CONFIDENTIALITY AND DISCLAIMER

11.1 The information you send us may be passed to colleagues within the Northern Ireland Office, the Government or related agencies. **Individual responses may also be published on the internet at www.gov.uk/nio unless a respondent has requested otherwise.** Information provided in response to this consultation, including personal information, may be published or disclosed in accordance with the access to information regimes. These are primarily: the Freedom of Information Act 2000 (FOIA), the Data Protection Act 1998 (DPA) and the Environmental Information Regulations 2004.

11.2 If you want the information that you provide to be treated as confidential, please be aware that, under the FOIA, there is a statutory Code of Practice, with which public authorities must comply, and which deals, amongst other things, with obligations regarding confidence. In view of this, it would be helpful if you could explain to us why you regard the information you have provided as confidential. If we receive a request for disclosure of the information we will take full account of your explanation, but we cannot give an assurance that confidentiality can be maintained in all circumstances.

11.3 Please ensure that your response is marked clearly if you wish your response to be kept anonymous. An automatic confidentiality disclaimer generated by your IT system will not, of itself, be regarded as binding on the Department. Confidential responses, included in any statistical summary of numbers of comments received and views expressed, will be anonymised. The Department will process your personal data strictly in accordance with the DPA. In most circumstances this will mean that your personal data will not be disclosed to third parties.