

Correspondence from the Electoral Commission

European Union Referendum Bill – referendum question assessment

I am writing following the introduction of the European Union Referendum Bill in the House of Commons on Thursday 28 May to invite comments on the proposed wording of the referendum question included in the Bill. Under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act (PPERA), the Electoral Commission is required to assess and comment on the intelligibility of any question included in a Bill for a UK-wide referendum.

As well as looking at the wording of the question ourselves, we will gather evidence to help us with our assessment. This will include:

- Carrying out research with voters from different backgrounds and across different areas, through focus groups and one to one interviews.
- Asking for advice from experts on accessibility and plain language.
- Talking to potential campaign groups, other interested groups and individuals, including political parties.

In order to inform our assessment, we are seeking your views on the wording of the referendum question which has been included in the Bill, which is as follows:

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

In Wales the following Welsh language version of the question wording would also appear on the ballot paper:

“A ddylai'r Deyrnas Unedig ddal i fod yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd?”

We have produced referendum question guidelines that we use to assess whether a proposed question is clear, simple and neutral. These guidelines can be found on our website [here](#) and it would be helpful if you consider the question in the context of these guidelines when giving us your views.

The Commission has previously assessed the wording of a question for a referendum on the United Kingdom's membership of the European Union, which was included in a Private Members' Bill introduced in 2013. We recommended in October 2013 that the proposed question wording should be amended to reduce the risk of misunderstanding or ambiguity about the current membership status of the UK within the EU. We provided two alternative question wordings for Parliament to consider:

- In English **“Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union?”** and in Welsh: **“A ddylai'r Deyrnas Unedig ddal i fod yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd?”**

The responses in English would be **“Yes”** and **“No”**, and in Welsh **“Dylai”** and **“Na ddylai”**

- In English “**Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?**” and in Welsh “**A ddylai'r Deyrnas Unedig bara i fod yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd neu adael yr Undeb Ewropeaidd?**”

The responses in English would be “**Remain a member of the European Union**”a “**Leave the European Union**” and in Welsh “**para yn aelod o'r Undeb Ewropeaidd**” and “**Gadael yr Undeb Ewropeaidd**”

However, we also highlighted in October 2013 that we had not been able to fully test the second of these two alternative question wordings in the time available to us before we reported. We therefore made clear that, if the UK Parliament amended the question in the Bill to include this wording, the Commission would undertake further work to check whether this wording raised any new issues of intelligibility.

Following further research which we carried out in early 2014, after the question wording included in the Bill had been amended to “Should the United Kingdom remain a member of the European Union or leave the European Union?”, we were satisfied that this question wording was clear and straightforward for voters and was also the most neutral wording from the range of options we had considered and tested.

A link to information about our previous question assessments and recommendations can be found on our website [here](#).

We are undertaking further research and consultation now because of the time which has passed since our previous research and assessment, and in order to ensure we have a clear understanding from campaigners about the impact of the question wording on their ability to campaign in support of or against either outcome. We would particularly welcome any comments and views on the implications for campaigners of using alternatives to “Yes” and “No” as response options in the English language version of any question wording. We would also welcome views on the implications for campaigners of using "Dylai" and "Na ddylai" or any alternatives as response options in the Welsh language version of any question wording.

If you would like to give us your views on the intelligibility of the proposed referendum question, you can email us at ReferendumQuestion@electoralcommission.org.uk. In order that we can consider your views as part of our assessment process, please reply not later than **Friday 19 June 2015**.

If you would like to put your views to us in a meeting, please contact us by **Friday 5 June 2015**. We will aim to hold any meeting not later than 19 June 2015. **Please note that the Commission may use extracts from named responses in its report on the question unless you let us know that you wish your comments to be considered confidential.**

We will report our views on the question to the UK Parliament and will make our findings public at the same time.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Scallan', with a horizontal line underneath.

Andrew Scallan
Cyfarwyddwr Gweinyddiaeth Etholiadol
Director Electoral Administration