

# FINAL REPORT

United Kingdom General Election  
8th June 2017



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20<sup>th</sup> June 2017



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# UK General Election – June 8<sup>th</sup> 2017

## Final Report on Election Observation

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### Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland.
2. To advise the local councils and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. Support local councils and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

### Methodology

Twenty teams made up of 73 observers made up in teams of 2, 3 or 4, who were registered with the UK's Electoral Commission, made 642 separate observations in 507 polling stations across the United Kingdom. We observed in 66 of the UK's 650 parliamentary constituencies.

Teams were deployed to all the English regions as well as in Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. Observers came from around the world, including 10 member states of the European Union and member states of the OSCE (including Canada, The United States of America and Moldova). This international group increased the ranks of Democracy Volunteers to produce the largest electoral observation of polling stations in UK electoral history.

The Observers came from our pool of UK observers and were, for the first time, augmented by several dozen observers from abroad, some with extensive experience of observation and others who had some recent experience. We were assisted in recruitment of observers by colleagues at the OSCE/ODIHR and AEGEE. Figure 1 shows the breadth of the geographic spread of the observer group.

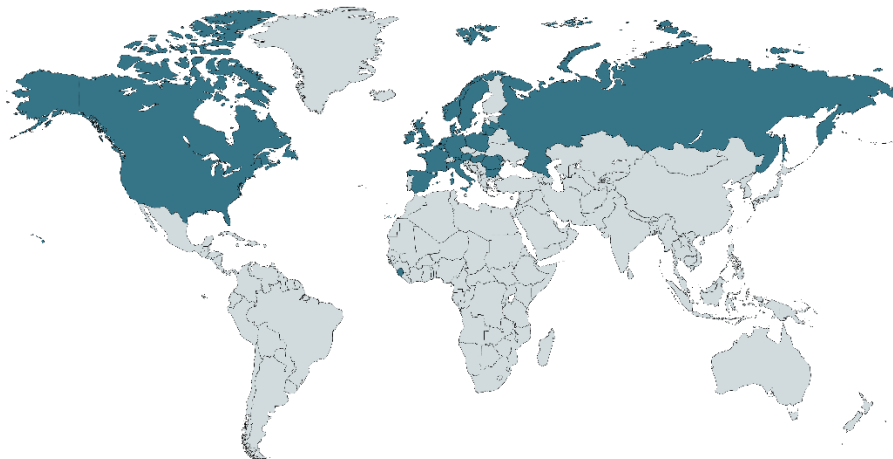


Figure 1 - Global distribution of observer group

Each observation was conducted in pairs to allow for objective observation and the observers then agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team. However, in some of the larger polling stations, most notably in Scotland and Northern Ireland (some having six separate ballot boxes) three or more of the team were deployed. The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

The observations generally took between fifteen and thirty minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station. This happened on every occasion.

The organisation of polling stations was generally well run across the UK, voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process.

## **Area of the Observation**

**South West:** St. Ives, Truro and Falmouth, Camborne and Redruth, Plymouth - Sutton & Devonport, South West Devon, North Devon, Torridge and West Devon and Salisbury (8)

**South East:** Slough, Maidenhead, Windsor, Reading East, Reading West, Newbury, Romsey and Southampton North and New Forest East (8)

**London:** Putney, Wimbledon, Richmond Park, Croydon North, Croydon Central, Croydon South, Islington South and Finsbury, Islington North and Holborn and St. Pancras (9)

**East Midlands:** Leicester West, Leicester East, Leicester South and North East Derbyshire (4)

**West Midlands:** Coventry North East, Coventry South, Warwick and Leamington and Stratford-upon-Avon (4)

**Eastern:** Cambridge, Harlow, Herford and Stortford and Brentwood and Ongar (4)

**North West:** City of Chester, Ellesmere Port and Neston, Warrington South, Weaver Vale, Ashton-under-Lyne, Denton and Reddish and Stockport (7)

**Yorkshire and the Humber:** Sheffield Central, Sheffield Heeley and Sheffield South East (3)

**North East:** Darlington (1)

**Wales:** Wrexham and Alyn and Deeside (2)

**Northern Ireland:** Belfast West, Belfast North and South Antrim (3)

**Scotland:** North East Fife, Dunfermline & West Fife, Glenrothes, Kirkcaldy and Cowdenbeath. Edinburgh South, Edinburgh East, Edinburgh North and Leith, Edinburgh South West, Edinburgh West, Dundee East, Dundee West, Angus and Perth and North Perthshire (13)

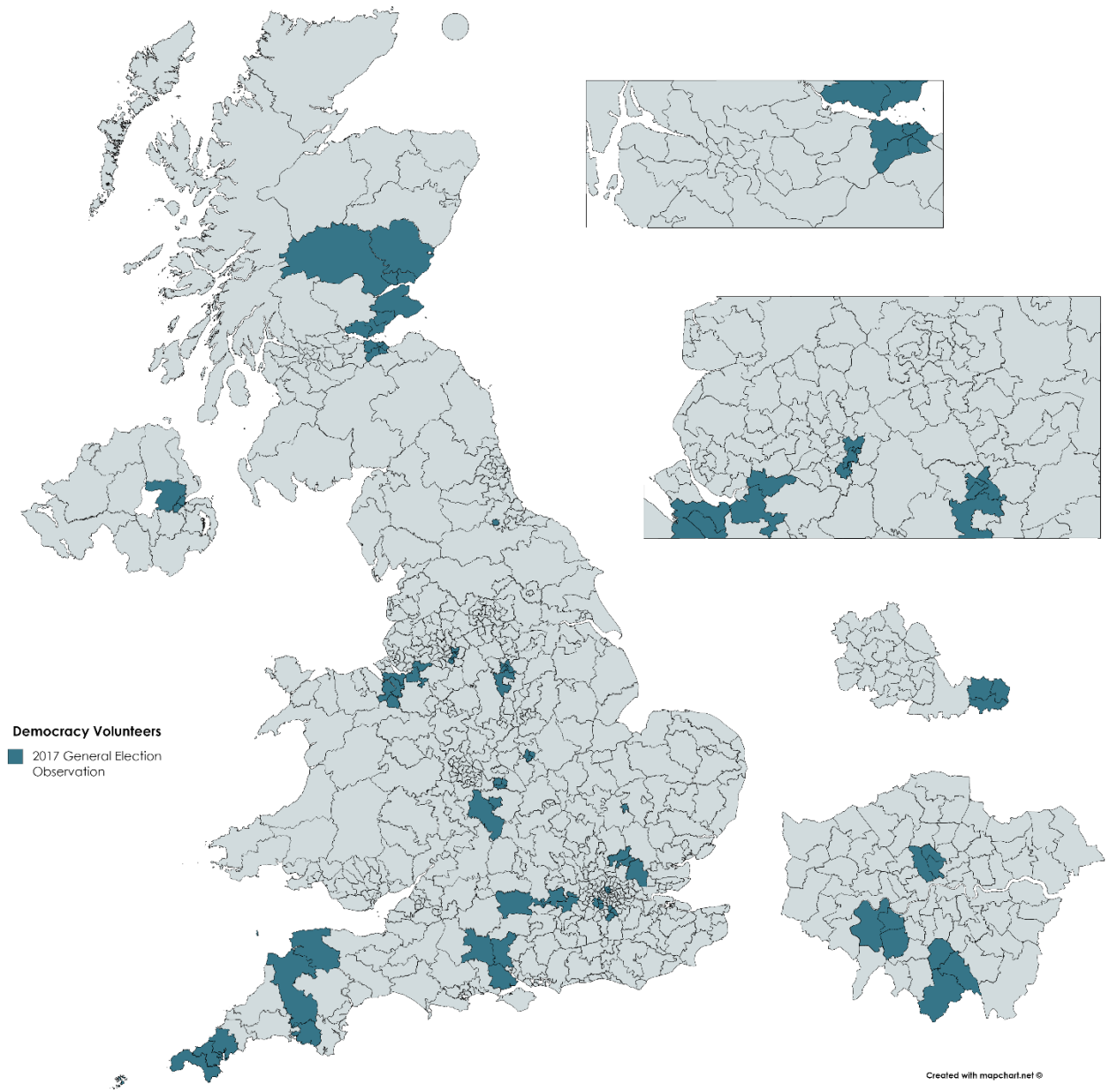
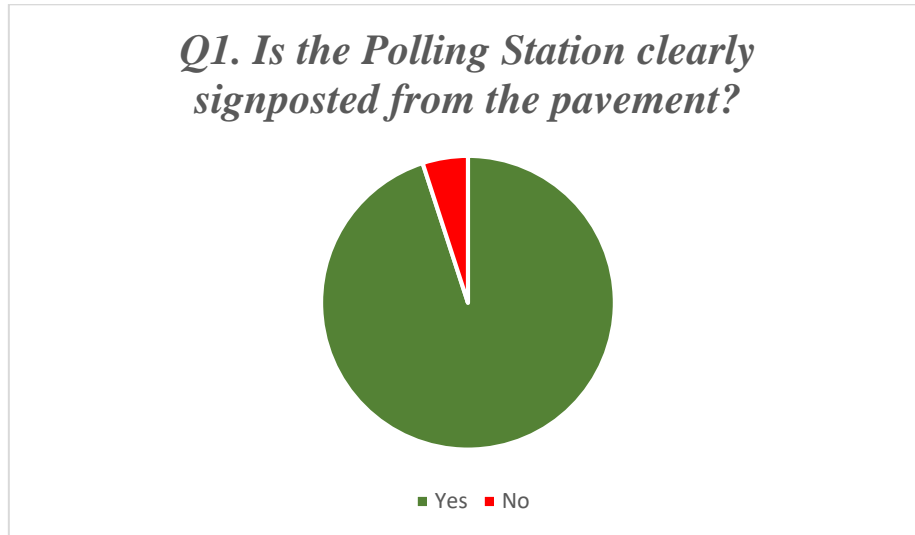


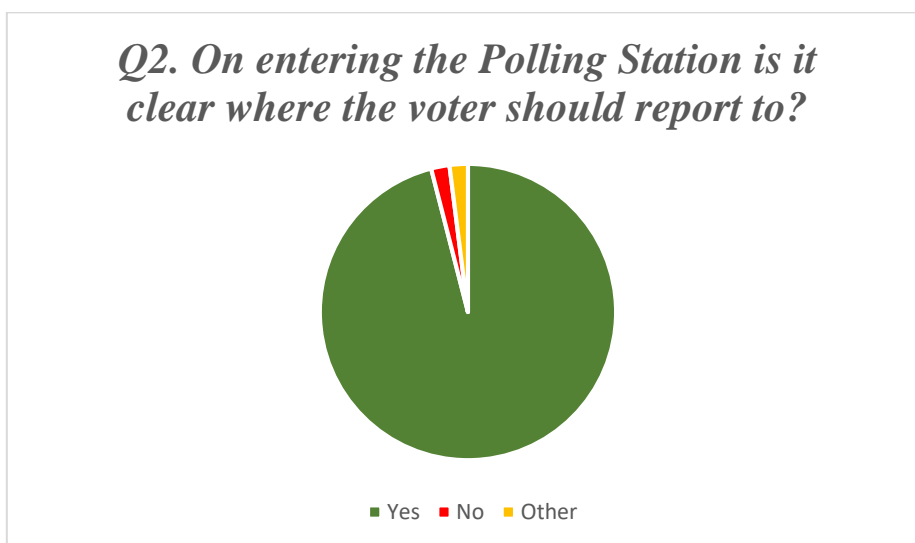
Figure 2 Area of the UK General Election Observation

## Results of the Observation

The observers answered the following questions in order as they progressed with each observation at each polling station:

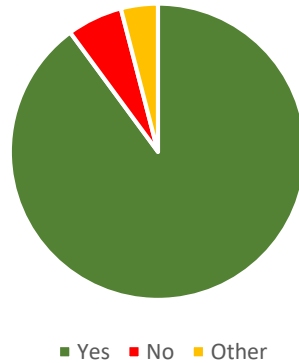


**QUESTION 1:** In 95% of cases polling stations were properly signposted from the pavement.



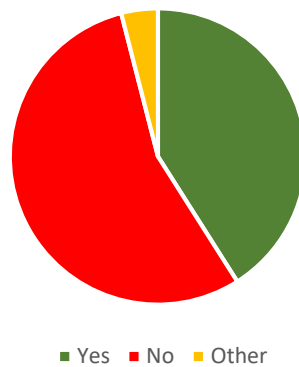
**QUESTION 2:** In 96% of cases, observers did not identify problems with where voters should report.

***Q3. Was it clear how disabled voters would access the Polling Station?***



**QUESTION 3:** 89% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear. Another 6% suggested that the disabled access was available however this was not clearly signposted. 5% identified other issues.

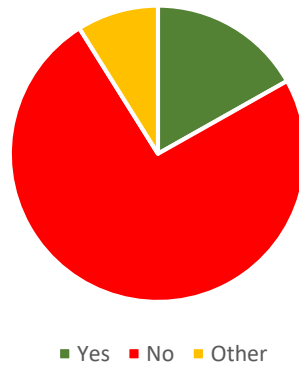
***Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?***



**QUESTION 4:** Polling staff were unaware that observation teams might be operating across the areas, the formal procedure for identifying, and then recording, that observers had visited the polling station was not followed in the vast majority of cases.

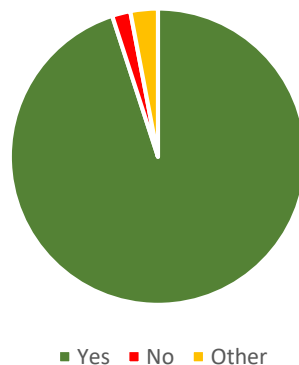
In only 41% of cases did observers have their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station. However, 55% did not check the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station.

***Q5. Did the staff record your ID number on a form?***



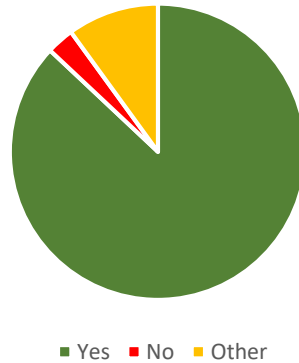
**QUESTION 5:** Similarly, we asked observers to note if the polling staff took a note of the ID that the observer was wearing. In each case this was an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered. Only 17% of polling stations recorded the ID details of the observers. Meanwhile, 74% of polling stations did not record attendance at all. As the country was an increased state of security awareness at the time of the election we were surprised at the absence of proper checks on ID for observers.

***Q6. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?***



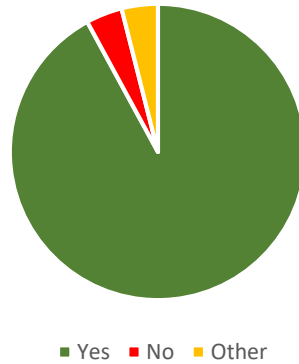
**QUESTION 6:** 95% of polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station.

***Q7. Is the Ballot Box clearly sealed with cable ties?***



**QUESTION 7:** An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at. 87% the ballot boxes were visibly sealed. 10% of ballot boxes were sealed but with fewer than the require number of cable ties. Please see recommendation two in the conclusions.

***Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?***



**QUESTION 8:** 93% of polling stations were properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster.

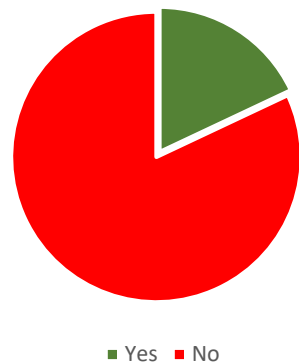


***Q9. Are there any political leaflets in sight within the Polling Station?***



**QUESTION 9:** This question was asked primarily to elicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.<sup>1</sup> 3% of polling stations were found to contain political leaflets while 97% did not.

***Q10. Was there evidence of 'family voting' in the polling station?***

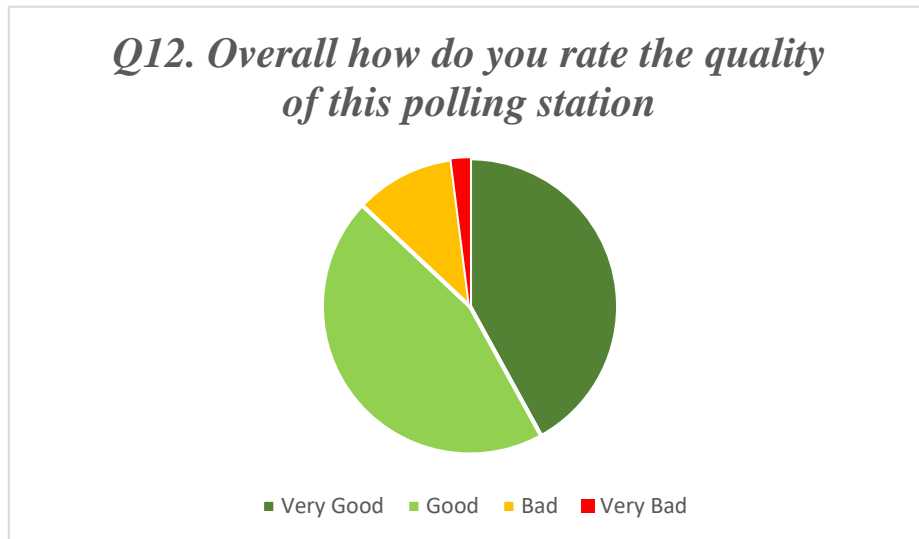


**QUESTION 10:** In 18% of cases, our observer team identified so-called ‘family voting’. OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes ‘family voting’ as an ‘unacceptable practice’.<sup>2</sup> It occurs where husband and wife voting together is normalised and women, especially, are unable to choose for themselves who they wish to cast their votes for and/or this is actually done by another individual entirely. We identified 147 separate cases of family voting in 115 of the 507 polling stations observed.

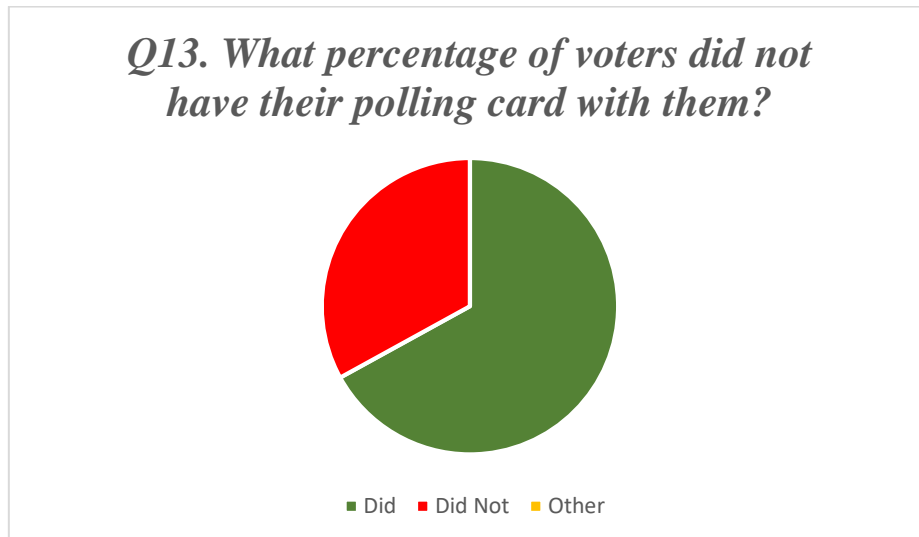
<sup>1</sup> This question did not just relate to literature specific to this election but observers were also asked to identify if other literature, such as MP or councillors’ surgeries were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

<sup>2</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>

**QUESTION 11:** Observers were asked to identify other authorised persons within the polling station. They reported that in 5% of cases, police officers were present, in 7% of cases other council staff were present, 3% of polling agents, 1% had candidates and 28% had candidate agents or representatives of the candidate.



**QUESTION 12:** Observers were asked for an overall rating of the polling station they had attended. 42% of polling stations were reported to be ‘Very Good’, 45% ‘Good’, 11% ‘Bad’, and 2% ‘Very Bad’.



**QUESTION 13:**

In 2017, with the planned pilot projects for the ‘Pickles Report’ likely to take place in 2018, we are evaluating the numbers of voters who attend the polling stations with, or without, their polling card. Although not a formal form of ID the card is also not a requirement to vote but is clearly evidence that the voter can provide to the polling staff that they are the registered voter and that they are eligible to vote. In the general election, 67% of the electorate attended with their polling card and 33% did not. This is based on a sample of 8682 voters observed.

## CONCLUSIONS

Access to voting was clear and despite the nature of some of the weather conditions on polling day officials dealt well with the process. However, an awareness of the nature of observation, and even the existence of observers, seemed entirely new and the process by which they should deal with observers seemed unclear.

Although the teams were asked to survey extra issues than usual concerning party activity outside polling stations none of these seemed relevant to the final observation as the process was very good natured. Telling was sporadic, at best, and on all but a few occasions the electorate was not impeded in its access to the polling stations.

As before we did find significant levels of family voting, indeed this was observed in 18% of all polling stations in the UK. This should be considered a significant finding, whilst lower than the highest incidence we have seen in Northern Ireland in March 2017, at 43%, this still indicates that more than a sixth of all polling stations had occurrences. Rarely did staff attempt to prevent it. This was even identified in the most marginal constituencies we observed.

## RECOMMENDATIONS

1. Councils should be given much greater information about election observers. We had a number of occurrences of accredited observers being limited or excluded from polling stations. The checking and recording of accreditation was unsystematic and haphazard and more formal processes should be maintained to maintain a more formal polling station log by presiding officers.

Checking accreditation and awareness of the role of observers was much more apparent at counting centres suggesting that senior electoral staff are aware of the regulations around observers but that the likelihood of the arrival of observers is not a clear part of the training that presiding officers receive.

2. The sealing of ballot boxes is a continuing concern to Democracy Volunteers as we continue to see unsealed, partly sealed and loose ballot boxes. The integrity of the ballot is fundamental and this should be considered a priority for electoral authorities.

Ballot boxes are not standardised and, as such, the method of sealing cannot always be clear. In the case of the use of cable ties this can often mean that the full complement of cable ties is not used and, at least in theory, the ballot box could be tampered with. Thus, we recommend that, following the observation in Edinburgh, other councils follow the practice that appears to have been adopted there. Each ballot box has uniquely coded cable ties which are clear to the voter, the polling station staff and any observers. This means there can be greater confidence in the security of the ballot box. We would recommend that this is adopted across the country.

3. 'Family voting' continues to be a significant concern for Democracy Volunteers. We observed it in 18% of all the polling stations across the UK. We recommend that

signage, similar to that used in the Netherlands, which we attach in Appendix 1, should be used to make voters more aware about the secrecy of the ballot.

We do not believe that the majority of voters who are engaged in family voting are aware that it is a breach of the secret ballot, so additional signage in polling stations would go some way to ameliorating this.

## APPENDIX 1

