

# FINAL REPORT

Brecon & Radnorshire – Westminster Parliamentary By-election  
1st August 2019



Dr John Ault

15<sup>th</sup> August 2019



---

# **Westminster Parliamentary By-election – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019**

## **Final Report on Election Observation – Brecon & Radnorshire**

---

### **Objectives**

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the Brecon and Radnorshire Westminster Parliamentary by-election – 1<sup>st</sup> August 2019.
2. To advise the local council and national electoral bodies on the results of the observation for the improvement of electoral practice within the UK.
3. To support the local council and national election bodies with constructive feedback on areas of concern so that they may consider remedial action.

### **Methodology**

A team of 6 observers registered with, and accredited by, the UK's Electoral Commission made 37 separate observations out of the 93 different polling stations in the Brecon and Radnorshire Parliamentary Constituency.

Each observation was conducted in pairs to allow for objective observation, following which the two observers agreed their opinions of the electoral process before submitting data to the central team.

The survey was conducted online so data was collected, and could be checked, live.

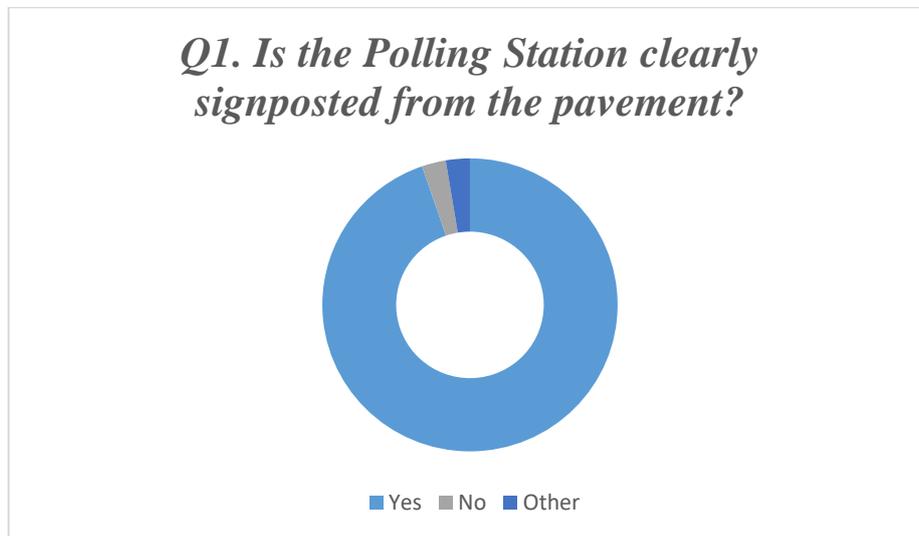
The observations generally took between thirty and forty-five minutes per polling station as the observers were asked to ensure that they attempted to see the entire process, which included staff greeting electors on arrival at the polling station.

Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observations were as uniform as possible.

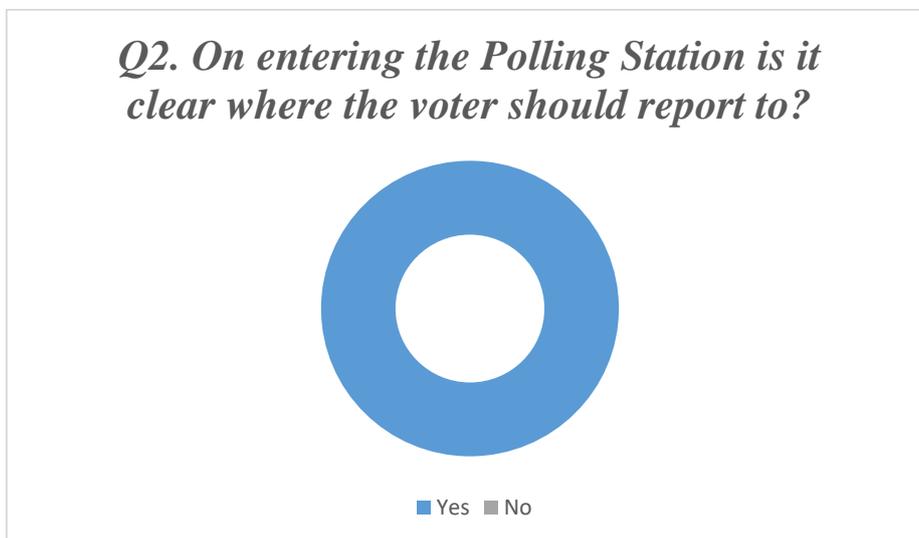
The organisation of polling stations was extremely well run across the council area. Voters could clearly see how to access voting and staff were trained to manage the process. Several supplementary procedures were in place to deal with what seemed to be anticipated challenges to the electoral process.

## Results of the Observation

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

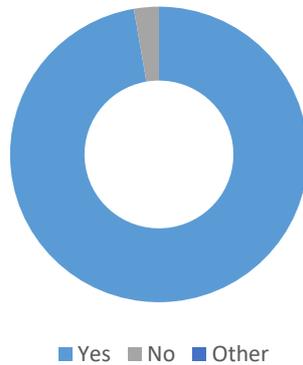


**QUESTION 1:** Signposting of the polling stations was generally very good. Some of the polling stations were sometimes difficult to find, but generally with local knowledge it was considered that they would be found easily enough.



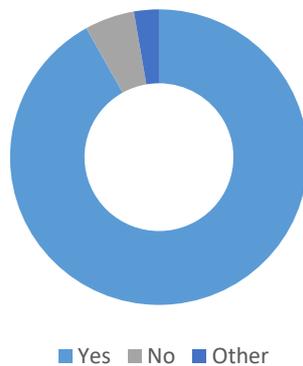
**QUESTION 2:** Observers identified no issues in terms of where voters should report in the polling stations. Those polling stations which had two ballot boxes did require voters to identify which half of the polling station they should attend but this was well signposted.

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



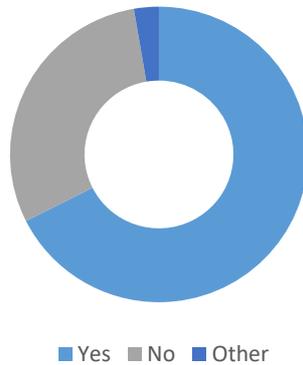
**QUESTION 3:** Disabled access was generally excellent despite some of the polling stations being placed in relatively old buildings, especially in the more rural parts of the constituency.

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



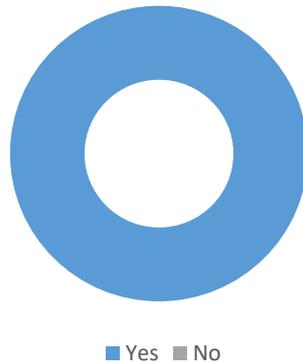
**QUESTION 4:** Polling staff were generally very aware that an observation team might be operating across the constituency. The formal procedure for identifying and then recording that observers had visited the polling station was followed in the vast majority of cases.

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



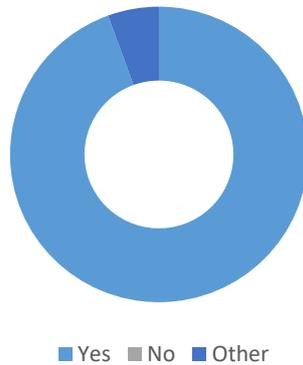
**QUESTION 5:** Similarly, although not to the same extent, 68% recorded these details at some point during the observation, however, this was not always at the start of the observation.

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



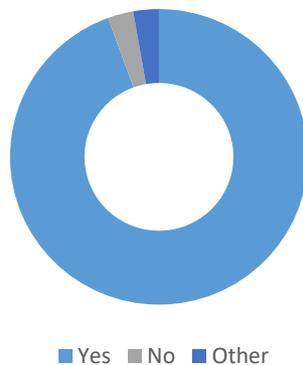
**QUESTION 6:** All of the polling stations had two members of polling staff on duty as observers arrived at the polling station.

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



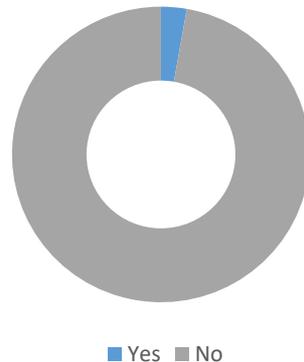
**QUESTION 7:** An important aspect of the electoral process is that the ballot should be secret and maintained as such, allowing no one access to the ballot papers. The process for closing and sealing a ballot box, from the opening of the polls at 7am and closing at 10pm, was observed. All but two of the ballot boxes observed were sealed correctly.

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



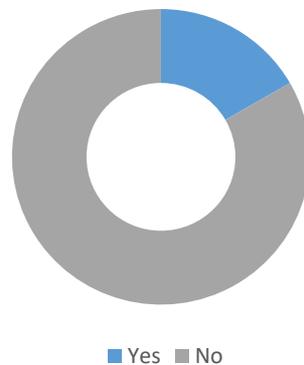
**QUESTION 8:** All but two of the polling stations were properly equipped with the requisite pencil and poster.

***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> On one occasion observers identified literature within the polling station which was biased towards one candidate. This was in plain sight of voters entering the station and should have been removed by polling staff.

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



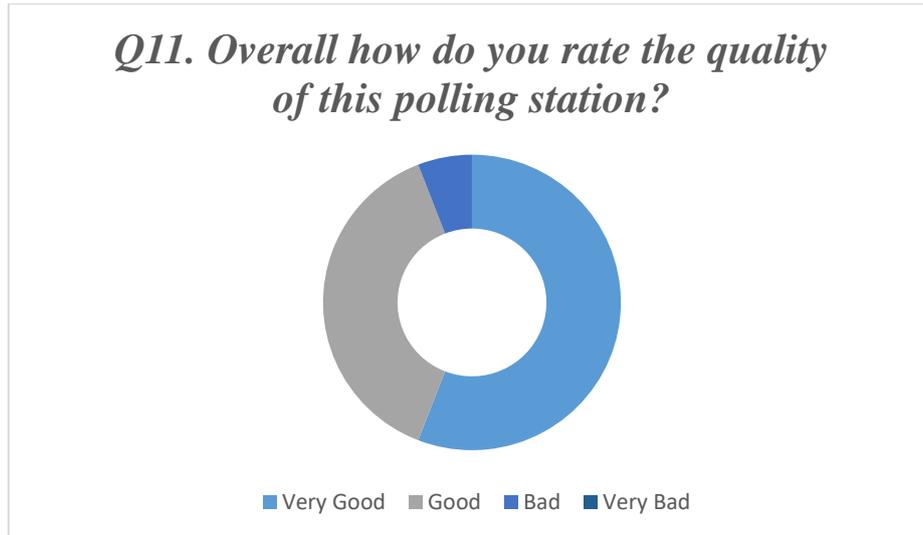
**QUESTION 10:** In 17% of polling stations (6 of the 37), our observer team identified so-called 'family voting'. 2.6% of all voters observed were directly involved in, or affected by, 'family voting'. This was predominantly family members sharing polling booths or several individuals viewing the voting intentions of their spouse. This showed their apparent preparedness for family voting.<sup>2</sup> The OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes 'family voting' as an 'unacceptable practice'.<sup>3</sup>

<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> The 2.6% figure compares to 8.5% in the recent Newport West by-election.

<sup>3</sup> <http://www.osce.org/>

***Q11. Overall how do you rate the quality of this polling station?***



**QUESTION 12:** Observers were asked for an overall rating of the polling station they had attended. 56% of polling stations were reported to be ‘Very Good’, 38% ‘Good’, 6% ‘Bad’, and none were ‘Very Bad’.

**CONCLUSIONS**

This was an excellently conducted election by the officials. Presiding officers and poll clerks were very welcoming and friendly to both voters and the observer groups, and we would like to thank all those that helped in our work.

**Family Voting**

As with several recent elections that Democracy Volunteers have observed, we continue to be concerned about the levels of ‘family voting’ at polling stations. Although the numbers were actually lower than we have seen in other elections, there continues to be a lack of awareness amongst the public that family voting should be prevented.

Our observer team saw ‘family voting’ in 17% of the polling stations attended which, bearing in mind the team records all the voters who attend polling stations, means that 2.6% of all the voters who we observed attending polling stations were involved in, or affected by, this practice.

**Telling and Party Activity**

Parties were very active on polling day in Brecon and Radnorshire and we saw a great number of tellers asking voters for their polling numbers. This is normal in a parliamentary by-election. On some occasions tellers and other party groups were found to be too close to the formal proceedings inside the polling station. Whilst we did not consider this activity to be intimidating we believe there are procedures that polling staff could take to ensure that voters have clearer access to the polling station.

## **RECOMMENDATIONS**

**R1.** Our observers identified some imperfections in the method for sealing the ballot boxes in Brecon and Radnorshire meaning that two were not sealed correctly. We would recommend that Powys considers how to better seal its ballot boxes to ensure the security of the ballot.

**R2.** We would recommend as part of the training for presiding officers that more attentions should be given to voters casting their ballots in the same polling booth. Whilst this was at a relatively low level in Brecon and Radnorshire we do feel this is an area where the electoral process in Powys could be made even more efficient.