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# Scottish local government ballot paper testing

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# Executive summary

## Background and aims

The Scottish Government is considering whether changes should be made to the order in which candidates are listed on ballot papers in Scottish local government elections, because it has been suggested that the current alphabetical ordering disadvantages candidates with surnames starting with letters towards the end of the alphabet. If two or more candidates from one party appear on the same ballot paper, as is common with the Single Transferable Vote system used in these elections, the candidate placed higher on the ballot paper is more likely to receive a first preference vote than their party colleague lower down the ballot paper. For this reason, it is thought by some that a candidate's chances of being elected are affected by the alphabetical ordering system.

To inform this decision, the Electoral Commission commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake qualitative research with voters. The aim was to test the effect of alternate approaches for ballot paper ordering on comprehensibility and the ease with which voters can cast their votes in line with their intentions. In addition to the current approach to ordering ballot papers (A-Z), two alternate approaches were tested – ballot papers in reverse alphabetical order (Z-A), and papers with the order of candidates drawn by lot.

## Methodology

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with members of the public aged 16+. It comprised:

- 102 face-to-face depth interviews using paper ballot papers
- 16 face-to-face eye-tracking interviews, using a camera to monitor participants' eye movements while they cast their votes on-screen using a computer.

Interviews were carried out in Dumfries, Edinburgh, Galashiels, Glasgow, Inverness, Stornoway and West Lothian. Fieldwork took place between 6 and 29 July 2019. The sample was designed to provide a broad range of people from different parts of Scotland (including urban and rural locations), covering a mix of ages and education levels, and including native Gaelic speakers. The sample was purposively weighted to include higher proportions of those who may potentially be more likely to experience difficulties when voting. This included younger people aged 16 to 19 (likely to have less experience of voting in elections), older people (more used to the first-past-the-post system), those with no qualifications, those with English as an additional language, people with low literacy, people with mild to moderate learning difficulties and people with a visual impairment.

### Interviews using paper ballot papers

At the start of each interview, participants were given a ballot paper (the different ordering approaches were rotated) and asked to complete it, while the researcher observed them. In approximately half the interviews, before voting the participant was shown a short leaflet for the fictitious candidate and asked to give that candidate their first vote, and to cast the rest of their votes as they normally would in a real election. The other participants were simply asked to cast their votes as they normally would in a real election.

Participants would then complete the ballot paper while the researcher observed their approach. They were asked about their initial reactions to the ballot paper and how easy or difficult they found it to complete. They were then asked about it

in more detail, including: how they found the candidates they were looking for (e.g. was it using the candidate name, party name or party emblem?); how easy or difficult it was to find their chosen candidate(s); what they liked/disliked about the layout of the paper; and, if not mentioned spontaneously by the participant, if they noticed the order of the candidates and if this made it any easier or more difficult for them to find who they wanted to vote for. Participants were then, in turn, shown the other two differently ordered versions of the ballot paper and for each asked how this compared to the version they first filled in.

### Eye-tracking interviews

During eye-tracking interviews, the participant viewed the ballot papers on a monitor and used a computer mouse to cast their votes on-screen. A camera attached to the monitor tracked and recorded the participant's eye movements while they cast their votes using the first version of the ballot paper they were shown.

## Does the order of candidate names affect voters?

The very clear finding from the testing was that the ordering of candidate names (A-Z, Z-A or by lot) on Scottish local government ballot papers does NOT affect voters' ability to comprehend and complete the ballot paper in line with their intentions. This applies whether participants were looking for a specific candidate or voting only on the basis of party.

The order of names has very little impact because:

1. Voters tend not to think about or notice the way in which candidate names have been ordered.
2. Those looking for a particular candidate therefore do not use alphabetical ordering to find them – they generally just look down the list until they find the name they are looking for. This was confirmed by the eye-tracking element of the research.

The eye-tracking data showed that there was very little difference in the time it took participants to find a specific, named candidate based on the order of the ballot paper and that differences were likely to be related to the candidate's position on the ballot paper (i.e. whether higher or lower), rather than the ordering approach.

## Voter's preferred ordering approach

In general participants favoured the A-Z approach, although it was also common for them to say that they had no strong preference – generally because they did not think it would make any difference to how people voted or how easy it was to complete the ballot paper. It was much less common for participants to say they preferred Z-A or ordering by lot.

The main reasons that participants preferred A-Z were:

- the fact that A-Z is the most commonly used and familiar system. It is therefore considered more transparent and (in that sense) 'fair'.
- a belief that it would be easier and quicker for people to find a particular candidate's name. (However, as discussed above, the belief that it would be easier for people to find a specific candidate using A-Z ordering is unfounded because people do not realise that the names are in alphabetical order – and so do not search for names on this basis).

It should be noted that participants who preferred A-Z ordering tended not to have a strong preference for it, nor did they think it would make it much easier or quicker for people to find their preferred candidates.

Where the ordering was not A-Z, or where participants did not realise that it was A-Z, there was some suspicion and speculation among a few who wondered if the ordering had been designed to the advantage of the party or parties nearer the top. While this emerged only because we were probing about order, and participants were therefore thinking about it more than they would normally have done, it is something that should be borne in mind if the decision is to change the approach – particularly if an ordering by lot approach is adopted. These responses suggest there will be a need for transparency about how the order is arrived at. While most voters will not notice the order, there is the potential for people to spot what may look like a non-random pattern[1], publicise it and potentially undermine confidence in the system.

## Findings relating to some specific groups of voters

We purposively sampled participants with English as an additional language, participants with learning difficulties, participants with low literacy and participants with visual impairment. For all of these groups, the findings on order were the same as for voters in general: they generally did not notice the order and it had no impact on their ability to complete the ballot paper. These participants also tended to prefer the A-Z ballot paper, but again, this was not a strong preference and they did not think it would make a big difference.

## Other issues identified

The focus of the testing was on the impact of the ordering of candidate names. However, a number of other issues emerged. These included:

- older voters were more likely than younger voters to spoil their ballots (mainly by putting multiple crosses or ticks) or not realise that they could vote for more than one candidate
- confusion in relation to the Single Transferrable Vote system – for example, some participants did not realise they could vote for more than one candidate from the same party or for more than one candidate
- a perception that it was odd and/or unfair that Independent candidates did not have an emblem (as it was thought this might lead to them being passed over).

[1] Ordering by lot in 354 wards could well result in some where all the candidates from one party are grouped at the top and all the candidates from another are grouped at the bottom. Of course, this may happen with A-Z too, but it is much easier to explain. We know that people can struggle to understand how randomness can result in seemingly non-random patterns.

# Background and methodology

## Background

The Scottish Government is considering whether changes should be made to the order in which candidates are listed on ballot papers in Scottish local government elections. These elections use the Single Transferrable Vote (STV) where voters number candidates in order of preference[2]. At present, electoral regulations require that the names of candidates are listed on the ballot paper alphabetically, by surname. However, it has been suggested that alphabetical ordering disadvantages those candidates with surnames starting with letters towards the end of the alphabet. If two or more candidates from one party appear on the same ballot paper, as is common with STV, it is often the case that the candidate placed higher on the ballot paper is more likely to receive a first preference vote than their party colleague lower down the ballot paper. For this reason, it is thought by some that a candidate's chances of being elected are affected by the alphabetical ordering system.

The Scottish Government is considering whether a different system of ordering candidates' names might mitigate any alphabetical effect; and if so, what form of new system should be adopted. Before making any changes, however, it is important to understand what impact, if any, this might have on voters.

To inform the Scottish Government's decision, the Electoral Commission commissioned Ipsos MORI to undertake qualitative research to gauge voter reactions to alternate approaches for ballot paper ordering. This report presents the findings from that research.

## Research aims and objectives

The aim of the research was to test alternate approaches for ballot paper ordering, and the effect of these approaches on comprehensibility and the ease with which voters can cast their votes in line with their intentions. In addition to the current approach to ordering ballot papers A-Z, two alternate approaches were tested – ballot papers in reverse alphabetical order (Z-A), and papers with the order of candidates drawn by lot.

The purpose of the research was not to explore or quantify the order effects in terms of the number of votes cast for different candidates under the different approaches – that is an issue that primarily concerns parties and individual candidates rather than voters. The purpose of this testing was to explore the impact of ordering on voters.

## Methodology

### Overall approach

The research was conducted using a qualitative approach, with members of the public aged 16+, comprising:

- 102 face-to-face depth interviews using paper ballot papers
- 16 face-to-face eye-tracking interviews, using a camera to monitor participants' eye movements while they cast their votes on-screen using a computer.

[2] This differs from First Past the Post (FPTP) where voters vote with a cross and usually select one candidate

A qualitative methodology was deemed appropriate because the aim was not to quantify the impact of different ordering approaches, but to identify, explore and understand the different issues or problems that might be encountered by voters.

### Sampling and recruitment

The sample was designed to provide a broad range of people from different parts of Scotland (including urban and rural locations), covering a mix of ages and education levels. Quotas were also set to ensure the sample included native Gaelic speakers and those who spoke English as an additional language.

The sample was purposively weighted to include higher proportions of those who may potentially be more likely to experience difficulties when voting. This included younger people aged 16 to 19 (likely to have less experience of voting in elections), older people (more used to the first-past-the-post system), those with no qualifications, those with English as an additional language, people with low literacy, people with mild to moderate learning difficulties and people with a visual impairment.

Those who were not eligible to vote in UK elections or who had never voted, and would never vote in any election were screened out of the research during recruitment.

Participants were recruited on-street in Edinburgh, Galashiels, Glasgow, Inverness and Stornoway. Participants for the eye-tracking interviews were recruited from Dumfries and Edinburgh. Most of the participants with visual impairment, learning difficulties and low literacy were recruited through organisations that work specifically with these groups (based in West Lothian, Edinburgh and Glasgow respectively).

The interviews lasted around 20-25 minutes on average and all participants received £20 as a 'thank you' for taking part.

The profile of the sample is shown below.

Table 1: Achieved sample of voters

| | Number of participants |
|---|---|
| **Location** | |
| Dumfries | 9 |
| Edinburgh | 39 |
| Galashiels | 12 |
| Glasgow | 30 |
| Inverness | 12 |
| Stornoway | 10 |
| West Lothian | 6 |
| **Gender** | |
| Male | 57 |
| Female | 61 |

| | |
|---|---|
| **Age** | |
| 16 to 19 | 18 |
| 20 to 39 | 34 |
| 40 to 64 | 34 |
| 65+ | 32 |
| **Education**[3] | |
| No qualifications | 26 |
| Qualifications below degree | 45 |
| Degree or above | 28 |
| **Specific groups**[4] | |
| Native Gaelic speakers | 11 |
| English as an additional language | 10 |
| Visual impairment | 9 |
| Low literacy | 6 |
| Learning difficulties | 12 |
| **Interest in politics** | |
| Very interested | 27 |
| Fairly interested | 45 |
| Not very interested | 28 |
| Not at all interested | 15 |
| Don't know | 3 |
| **Self-reported likelihood to vote in the next local government election** | |
| Very likely | 78 |
| Fairly likely | 19 |
| Not very likely | 7 |
| Not at all likely | 9 |
| Don't know | 1 |
| Not asked | 4 |

[3] We do not have information on education level for the participants with visual impairment, low literacy and learning difficulties who were recruited through organisations who work with these groups, nor for one other participant.

[4] Participants from these groups are also included in the other breakdowns in this table

## Design of the ballot papers

At each of the six locations[5], three different approaches to the ballot paper ordering were designed and tested:

- standard, A-Z, alphabetical ordering (the current design)
- reverse, Z-A, alphabetical ordering
- ordering by lot[6].

Different approaches to ordering are likely to have the biggest impact on voters who know in advance the name of the candidate(s) they wish to vote for. For each area, two versions of the ballot paper were designed. One included a fictitious candidate from a fictitious party[7], while the other did not. In approximately half the interviews[8] the participant was asked to give that candidate their first vote. This meant that there were 36 different versions of the ballot paper in total (examples of the ballot papers are shown in Appendix A).

Aside from the inclusion of the fictitious candidate, in terms of the balance of male/female candidates, and the names and addresses of candidates, as much as possible the ballot papers were designed to replicate actual ballot papers from the location of the interview. Most of the names shown were actual, previous candidates from a local ward in that location, and the addresses, while fictional, closely matched the names of actual addresses in each ward (e.g. by changing the name of X Avenue to X Road). The number of independent candidates also took into account the proportion typically found in that area (e.g. more in Inverness and Stornoway, and fewer in Edinburgh and Glasgow).

In order for the test to mirror a real-life situation as far as possible, the length of the ballot papers was chosen to be similar to the length of ballot papers typically found in each area at the most recent local government elections in Scotland in 2017. For example, the Dumfries and Galashiels ballot papers displayed eight candidates, and those for Edinburgh and Glasgow displayed ten. On each ballot paper there was at least one party with two or more candidates.

In advance of the interviews, participants were pre-allocated a ballot paper to use to cast their votes. Since the aim of the research was to test the impact of alternate approaches to ordering from the current A-Z design, these allocations were disproportionately weighted towards Z-A and ordering by lot. The numbers tested are shown below.

[5] The interviews with visually impaired participants took place in West Lothian using the Edinburgh ballot paper.

[6] The 'by lot' versions of the ballot papers were not actually decided by lot as they would be in reality, but were designed to appear random and to ensure the ordering of candidates was sufficiently different from the A-Z and Z-A ballots to enable a valid test of the impact.

[7] On the Dumfries, Edinburgh, Galashiels, Glasgow and West Lothian ballot papers the fictitious candidate was John Fraser of the Integrity Alliance, in Stornoway it was John McInnes of the Integrity Alliance, and in Inverness it was an independent candidate named John McInnes. The names were chosen so that they would appear towards the top/bottom of the ballot in A-Z/Z-A ordering.

[8] 53 of the 102 participants who completed a paper copy of the ballot paper.

Table 2: Ballot papers tested in depth interviews[9]

| Ballot paper ordering | Number of ballot papers tested | Number of ballot papers including the fictitious candidate |
|---|---|---|
| A-Z | 20 | 11 |
| Z-A | 43 | 21 |
| By lot | 39 | 21 |
| *Total* | *102* | *53* |

### Interviews using paper copies of the ballot paper

The interview rooms were set up to replicate the key elements of the real-life polling booth experience as far as practical, while allowing the researcher to observe the participant. Interviews took place in a private room, with voting taking place at a table set up against a wall and an 'Information for Voters' instruction poster attached to the wall in front[10].

At the start of each interview, participants were given a paper copy of the ballot paper and asked to complete it, while the researcher observed them[11]. In approximately half the interviews before voting the participant was shown a short leaflet for the fictitious candidate and asked to give that candidate their first vote, and to cast the rest of their votes as they normally would in a real election (an example of the leaflet is shown in Appendix B). They would hand the leaflet back to the researcher before casting their votes. These participants were then given the version of the ballot paper which included the fictitious candidate. The other participants were simply asked to cast their votes as they normally would in a real election.

Participants would then complete the ballot paper while the researcher observed their approach, noting how long they took, any comments made by the participant, signs of confusion or hesitation and, if possible, which parts of the paper they looked at. They were then asked about their initial reactions to the ballot paper and how easy or difficult they found it to complete. They were then asked about it in more detail, including: how they found the candidates they were looking for (e.g. was it using the candidate name, party name or party emblem?); how easy or difficult it was to find their chosen candidate(s); what they liked/disliked about the layout of the paper; and, if not mentioned spontaneously by the participant, if they noticed the order of the candidates and if this made it any easier or more difficult for them to find who they wanted to vote for.

Participants were then, in turn, shown the other two differently ordered versions of the ballot paper and for each asked: how this compared to the version they first filled in; if they would have found it any easier or more difficult to find the candidates they voted for; and if they would have voted differently had they used this version. There were then asked which ordering they preferred overall and why (a copy of the interview discussion guide is shown in Appendix C).

[9] Excludes eye-tracking interviews which are reported separately below.

[10] Except for the interviews with participants with low literacy and visual impairment, and the eye-tracking interviews in Dumfries, where it was not possible to set up a table against a wall with a poster (due to other equipment in the rooms).

[11] Visually impaired participants were shown large print versions of the materials for reference but voted on standard sized ballot papers as they would in an actual election.

### Eye-tracking interviews

Eye-tracking interviews were carried out with 16 participants – seven in Dumfries[12] and nine in Edinburgh. All participants taking part in this aspect of the research were given the leaflet for the fictitious candidate prior to voting and asked to give that candidate their first vote.

During eye-tracking interviews, the participant viewed the ballot papers on a monitor and used a computer mouse to cast their votes on-screen[13]. This element of the research therefore did not fully replicate the real-life polling booth experience. However, the reactions and views of participants who took part in these interviews were the same as those who completed paper copies of the ballot paper and so it seems this approach made little or no difference to how participants cast their votes.

A camera attached to the monitor tracked the participant's eye movements while they cast their votes using the first version of the ballot paper they were shown[14]. The eye-tracking software recorded 'fixation points', points on the screen where the participant's gaze remained relatively stationary. This enabled the software to calculate the length of time participants looked at the different aspects of the ballot paper, such as the instructions, candidates' names and addresses[15], the party names, and the party emblems.

The different versions of the ballot paper used during eye-tracking interviews are shown in Table 3 below.

**Table 3: Ballot papers tested in eye-tracking interviews**

| Ballot paper ordering | Number tested |
|---|---|
| A-Z | 4 |
| Z-A | 5 |
| By lot | 7 |
| *Total* | *16* |

Following their vote, eye-tracking interview participants were asked the same questions as those who completed paper copies of the ballot paper.

### Fieldwork dates

All fieldwork took place between 6 and 29 July 2019.

## Interpreting qualitative findings

The aim of qualitative research of this nature is to identify, explore and understand the different issues or problems that might be encountered by voters. The assumption is that issues or problems encountered by participants will be a

[12] The research team were unable to calibrate the eye-tracking camera for two participants in Dumfries. These participants completed a hard copy version of the ballot paper instead.

[13] The monitor was large enough to fully display the ballot paper on-screen, without the need for the candidate to scroll down using the mouse to view it in its entirety.

[14] Eye-tracking was not carried out on the subsequent versions of the ballot paper shown to participants.

[15] The eye-tracking camera was unable to distinguish between whether the participant looked at the name or the address of a candidate.

reflection of the issues and problems that the wider population will encounter. Although the extent to which they apply to the wider population cannot be quantified, the value of qualitative research is in identifying the range of different issues and problems, and understanding why they arise and the way in which they impact on people.

At several points in the report, the number of participants who did or thought something is reported. These numbers are provided to give a sense of the relative scale of issues/preferences encountered in the research – but they should not be extrapolated to the wider population or for specific sub-groups because the sample was small (particularly in relation to specific sub-groups) and was not designed to be representative.

# Does the order of candidate names affect voters?

## Main finding

This was a testing exercise rather than a real election and, although steps were taken to replicate the experience of voting as far as was practical, the limitations of any such exercise should be borne in mind. That said, the very clear finding from the testing was that the ordering of candidate names (A-Z, Z-A or by lot) on Scottish local government ballot papers does NOT affect voters' ability to comprehend and complete the ballot paper in line with their intentions. This applies whether they are looking for a specific candidate or voting only on the basis of party.[16] It also applies when there are a large number of Independent candidates on the ballot paper and when are very few or no Independent candidates.

The order of names has very little impact because:

1. Voters tend not to think about or notice the way in which candidate names have been ordered.
2. Those looking for a particular candidate therefore do not use alphabetical ordering to find them – they generally just look down the list until they find the name they are looking for. This was confirmed by the eye-tracking element of the research.

## The extent to which voters notice the ordering

In discussion about what they thought of the ballot paper, the order of names was rarely raised spontaneously (15 of the 118 participants did so). Spontaneous comments tended to be about other aspects such as the lack of emblems for independent candidates or the inclusion of addresses.

Where names were in A-Z order, few participants noticed. Similarly, when names were ordered Z-A or by lot, few noticed that they were not in A-Z order:

- 3 of the 24 given A-Z said they had noticed that it was in alphabetical order
- 1 of the 48 given Z-A said they had noticed that it was in reverse alphabetical order, a further 4 said they had noticed that it was not in alphabetical order (but not that it was in reverse alphabetical order)
- 3 of the 46 given papers ordered by lot said they had noticed that it was not in alphabetical order.[17]

When specifically asked to look at the order (i.e. not spontaneous reactions) and say what they thought it was:

- a further 6 of the 24 given A-Z realised it was A-Z (others did not know)

[16] Where a party was fielding more than one candidate, there was a tendency to vote for the candidate(s) listed higher up the ballot but it was not the purpose of the testing to measure the impact of that – that is an issue that primarily concerns parties and individual candidates rather than voters. The purpose of this testing was to explore the impact of ordering on voters.

[17] Of the remaining four of the 15 referred to above, three spontaneously commented that the names were not ordered by party and the fourth spontaneously commented that he did not know why the names were in the order they were.

- a further 8 of the 48 given Z-A realised it was Z-A (others thought it was just random or did not know).

Some participants focused on the emblems and commented on the ordering by party (i.e. the extent to which candidates from the same party were grouped or separated). There were different views on whether: it was better to group candidates from the same party together (it was thought that people would then be less likely to miss someone from a party they wanted to vote for), or it was better not to group candidates from the same party together because this was fairer (a grouping of one party at or near the top of the ballot was seen as an unfair advantage). In general, however, these participants did not think it would make much difference to how people voted.

### Impact of order on finding a specific candidate's name

The testing involved 70[18] of the 118 participants being given a flyer for a fictitious candidate and being asked to give their first vote to him. Of those who failed to give their first vote to this candidate, but the ordering of the names was never the reason. (The reasons for not voting for the candidate included forgetting the name, preferring to vote for the party they usually voted for and not wanting to vote for someone they knew nothing about. Nobody indicated being unable to find the candidate's name as the reason for not voting for him).

The eye-tracking data (discussed below) showed that there was very little difference in the time it took participants to find the fictitious candidate based on the order of the ballot paper and that differences were likely to be related to the candidate's position on the ballot paper (i.e. whether higher or lower), rather than the ordering approach.

### Impact of order on spoiled ballots

Where ballot papers would have been classed as spoiled, this was to do with other aspects of the process and not the ordering of candidate names. The main reason for spoiled ballots was using multiple ticks or crosses, instead of numbers. Twenty of the 118 participants spoiled their ballots and in one further case (where the participant had attempted to amend their vote by scribbling out a mark) it was not clear if the ballot would be accepted. This is a much higher rate of spoiled ballots than would be expected in a real election as the sample was deliberately skewed towards those that might be expected to have more difficulty. (Just 1.95% of ballots were rejected in the 2017 Scottish Council Elections, 1.74% were rejected in 2012 and 1.83% were rejected in 2007).[19]

# Findings from the eye-tracking interviews

### Finding a specific name

In line with the views of those who used paper copies of the ballot paper, participants in the eye-tracking interviews said they experienced no difficulties finding the fictitious candidate and that the ordering of the ballot paper made no difference to their ability to complete the ballot paper.

The eye-tracking data confirms that there was little difference in the time it took participants to find the fictitious candidate they were told to vote for based on the order of the ballot paper (Table 4). On average, it took participants less than three seconds to find the name after they first started looking at the candidates on-screen.

[18] All of the eye tracking participants and all of the participants with visual impairment were asked to vote for the fictitious candidate on the flyer. Half of the other candidates were asked to do so.

[19] https://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/sites/default/files/pdf_file/2017-Scottish-Council-elections-Report.pdf

**Table 4: Average time to find specific candidate by ballot paper order**

| Ballot paper | Average time to find specific candidate [20] (seconds) |
|---|---|
| A to Z | 3.2 |
| Z to A | 3.6 |
| By lot | 1.3 |
| Overall | 2.7 |

*Based on the 16 eye-tracking participants*

Although Table 4 shows that, on average, candidates took slightly longer to find the name in Z to A order, and less time to find the name when the ballot was ordered by lot, this is most likely related to the candidate's position on the ballot paper, rather than difficulty finding them as a consequence of ordering – in both Edinburgh and Dumfries, the fictitious candidate that participants were asked to vote for was further down the ballot on the Z to A version of the ballot paper, and higher up the ballot paper ordered by lot (Table 5) and, in general, participants would read the names starting from towards the top of the list and work their way down. Therefore, the eye-tracking data shows that the ordering of the ballot paper did not appear to impact on participants' ability to find a specific name.

**Table 5: Time to find specific by position on ballot paper**

| Dumfries | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ballot paper | Average time to find specific name (seconds) | Position on the list (from the top) |
| A to Z | 3.9 | 3 out of 8 |
| Z to A | 5.2 | 6 out of 8 |
| By lot | 1.5 | 2 out of 8 |
| Overall | 3.5 | - |

*Based on the 7 eye-tracking participants in Dumfries*

| Edinburgh | | |
|---|---|---|
| Ballot paper | Average time to find John Fraser (seconds) | Position on the list (from the top) |
| A to Z | 2.4 | 4 out of 10 |
| Z to A | 2.4 | 7 out of 10 |
| By lot | 1.2 | 2 out of 10 |
| Overall | 2.0 | - |

*Based on the 9 eye-tracking participants in Edinburgh*

[20] Timings are taken from when the participant first started looking at the candidates on-screen. If a participant read the instructions first before looking at the candidates, the time it took for them to do so has been removed from these calculations

# Voters' preferred ordering approach

After being shown the three differently ordered versions of the ballot paper, participants were asked which ordering approach they preferred[21]. In general participants favoured the A-Z approach, although it was also common for them to say that they had no preference – generally because they did not think it would make any difference to how people voted or how easy it was to complete the ballot paper. It was much less common for participants to say they preferred Z-A or ordering by lot.

- Half of participants (60 out of 118) preferred A-Z.
- Around a third of participants (41 out of 118) indicated that they had no preference – generally because they did not think it would make any difference to how people voted or how easy it was to complete the ballot paper
- A few (9 out of 118) preferred the ordering by lot
- A few (7 out of 118) preferred Z-A.

## Reasons for preferring A-Z

The main reasons that participants preferred A-Z were:

- the fact that A-Z is the most commonly used and familiar system. It is therefore considered more transparent and (in that sense) 'fair'.
- a belief that it would be easier and quicker for people to find a particular candidate's name.

*"A to Z seems the most neutral [approach and] there's a sort of logic to it."*

Male, 20-39, Edinburgh

*"Any order would work but we are used to looking for names in alphabetical order".*

Female, 20-39, Glasgow

However, as discussed above, the belief that it would be easier for people to find a specific candidate using A-Z ordering is unfounded because people do not realise that the names are in alphabetical order – and so do not search for names on this basis.

*"[Order] doesn't help, particularly if you don't know that it's in alphabetical order… It only helps if you are aware."*

Female, 40-64, Edinburgh

It should be noted that participants who preferred A-Z ordering tended not to have a strong preference for it, nor did they think it would make it much easier or quicker for people to find their preferred candidates.

[21] When presented with the different versions of the ballot paper, participants were not told that the A-Z approach is the current ordering system for ballot papers in UK elections.

Where the ordering was not A-Z, or where they did not realise that it was A-Z, there was some suspicion and speculation among a few participants who wondered if the ordering had been designed to the advantage of the party or parties nearer the top.

> *"[If it was not in A-Z order,] I'd just be suspicious about who's at the top… Are candidates at the top because they are the favourite?"*
>
> Female, 65+, Glasgow

> *"You know there are no mind games [with A-Z order]."*
>
> Female, 20-39, Stornoway

While this emerged only because we were probing about order, and participants were therefore thinking about it more than they would normally have done, it is something that should be borne in mind if the decision is to change the approach – particularly if an ordering by lot approach is adopted. These responses suggest there will be a need for transparency about how the order is arrived at. While most voters will not notice the order, there is the potential for people to spot what may look like a non-random pattern[22], publicise it and potentially undermine confidence in the system.

## Reasons for preferring ordering by lot

Among the few participants who preferred the by lot order, reasons included a belief that the lack of order would encourage people to look more carefully at the full list and a belief that it was fairer for candidates.

## Reasons for preferring Z-A

Among the few who preferred Z-A ordering, the reasons seemed unrelated to the concept of a reverse alphabetical approach and more to do with coincidental aspects of the particular Z-A ballot paper they were given – e.g. that it seemed 'cleaner' (possibly because the addresses of candidates at the top of the list were shorter/simpler or the position of the independent candidate with no emblem) or because candidate(s) from their preferred parties were nearer the top.

It should be noted that we did not discuss in detail with participants the fact that, in practice, the actual approach would be to have half the ballots A-Z and half the ballots Z-A. We were exploring their preferences and reactions to a Z-A ballot paper and how easy or difficult it was for them to find their preferred candidates using this approach.

[22] Ordering by lot in 354 wards could well result in some where all the candidates from one party are grouped at the top and all the candidates from another are grouped at the bottom. Of course, this may happen with A-Z too, but it is much easier to explain. We know that people can struggle to understand how randomness can result in seemingly non-random patterns.

# Findings relating to some specific groups of voters

We purposively sampled participants with English as an additional language, participants with learning difficulties, participants with low literacy and participants with visual impairment. Specific findings related to each group are detailed below – but the key point is that, for all of these groups, the findings on order were the same as for voters in general: they generally did not notice the order and it had no impact on their ability to complete the ballot paper.

## Voters with English as an additional language

The sample included ten voters who had English as an additional language. Some found the ballot paper very easy to complete while some said they found it hard. However, the order of candidate names was not the reason for any difficulties – these were to do with confusion or uncertainty about the system such as whether to put an 'X' or how many candidates to vote for.

In line with other participants, those with English as an additional language tended to say they preferred an A-Z ordering, but this was not a strong preference and they did not think it would make a big difference.

## Voters with learning difficulties

Testing was undertaken with 12 participants with a range of different, mild to moderate, learning difficulties. There was no evidence that order had any impact on their ability to complete the ballot paper. Some of these participants spoiled their ballots (by using multiple ticks) but this was nothing to do with order, while some of the participants who were asked to vote for a specific candidate failed to do so but, again, this was nothing to do with order.

As with the other participants, voters with learning difficulties tended to say that they would prefer an A-Z approach and thought this would be easier for people. Two participants with dyslexia specifically mentioned that they thought A-Z was easier for people with dyslexia – although they had both completed non A-Z ballot papers without any difficulty (one was ordered Z-A and the other was ordered by lot). A third participant said that he thought A-Z was easier "for people with learning disability or difficulty reading… it stands out better" but, again, he had completed a ballot ordered by lot and the order had not caused him any problem.

Two of the participants commented that the list of names was very long (there were ten names) and that this made the task of voting harder.

## Voters with low literacy

Six voters with low literacy were recruited from a community learning campus which provided literacy classes. There was no evidence that the order of candidate names had any impact on their ability to complete the ballot paper. All participants asked to vote for the fictitious candidate did so. Some of these participants spoiled their ballots (by putting multiple Xs/ticks) but this was not because of the order.

Five of these participants preferred the A-Z ballot paper. One had a strong preference for this as she thought it was 'more professional'. Two said they thought it would be easier to find a candidate's name – however, one had been given the A-Z ballot to complete and had not noticed that it was in A-Z order, the other had been given a ballot ordered by lot and had

quickly found the fictitious candidate. Two others preferred the A-Z ballot, not because it was alphabetical (which they had not noticed), but because the candidates from the party they wanted to vote happened to be at the top.

The term 'Independent' caused confusion among participants with low literacy. Some participants appeared to think this meant the Independent candidate was from the SNP while another seemed to make an association with the UK Independence Party (UKIP).

## Voters with visual impairment

Nine voters in the sample had significant visual impairment.[23] There was no evidence that the order of candidate names had any impact on their ability to complete the ballot paper. Several participants asked to vote for the fictitious candidate failed to do so, but order was never the reason, and several spoiled their ballots (by putting multiple crosses or ticks) but, again, this was nothing to do with order: they had either not read the instructions or asked the researcher to read the instructions. More generally, the participants with visual impairment seemed less likely to look at the instructions – perhaps because they were trying to minimise the amount of text they read.

Participants with visual impairment tended to say they had no preference about the order. However, two indicated a preference for A-Z. One said she would find A-Z easier because 'I do a lot by memory and would look for the name of a person' – although she had nonetheless found the name of the fictitious candidate (on the Z-A ballot) and had not noticed the order at the time. A third participant, who was given a ballot paper ordered by lot (and had found the fictitious candidate's name very quickly), had not noticed anything about the order but, when prompted to look at it, said 'would it not be easier to do it alphabetically then you could look down it?' and he indicated that it would be easier for him personally. However, when then shown the A-Z ballot paper, he immediately said 'that's alphabetical order – to be honest, I don't think it'll make much difference!'

Several participants commented that the normal sized ballot paper was clear and that the large font was helpful.

When designing the test for voters with visual impairment, a tactile voting device (TVD)[24] was not used. There are existing concerns regarding the usefulness of the TVD when used at STV elections and so, to avoid any confusion or difficulties with the TVD as opposed to ordering of candidates, it was not used as part of this research.

[23] Six of these participants were specifically recruited on the basis of having a visual impairment. For these interviews, we provided a large-print reference ballot paper which they could use, if they wished, to refer to before completing the normal sized ballot paper. This is currently one of the options available at all polling places.

In the event, two of the participants used the large-print reference ballot (one using a hand-held electronic reader which magnified the print). One participant used an electronic reader on the normal sized ballot and another used a magnifying glass on the normal sized ballot. One asked the researcher to read out the instructions and then used the party emblems to complete the ballot. One asked the researcher to read out the whole ballot paper. Three participants were able to use the normal sized ballot paper without the use of visual aids (other than glasses).

[24] https://www.rnib.org.uk/information-everyday-living-your-rights/voting-and-elections

# Other findings from the eye-tracking interviews

## Time spent looking at the other sections of the ballot paper

Alongside identifying how long it took participants to find a specific, named candidate, the eye-tracking data also allowed us to better understand how participants navigated the ballot paper and the sections they gave more attention to than others.

Participants who used paper versions of the ballot paper as well as those who took part in the eye-tracking interviews tended to say that, unless they were looking for a specific name, the party emblems were the most useful section of the ballot paper to help them find their preferred candidates, rather than the candidate or party name. As shown in Table 6, on average participants in the eye-tracking interviews spent almost as much time looking at the party emblems as they did the names and addresses of candidates. On average participants spent 7.9 seconds looking at party emblems, while they spent 9.6 seconds looking at participants' names and address. Indeed, it was common for participants to scan down the list until they found the candidate they had been asked to vote for, to cast their first vote for him, and then to look at the emblems before the names when casting their subsequent votes.

**Table 6: Average time spent looking at sections of ballot paper**

| Section | Time (secs) | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| | Overall | Dumfries | Edinburgh |
| Candidate name/address | 9.6 | 8.4 | 10.6 |
| Party emblems | 7.9 | 3.6 | 11.2 |
| Instructions | 4 | 3.9 | 4.1 |
| Party names | 3.9 | 4.6 | 3.4 |

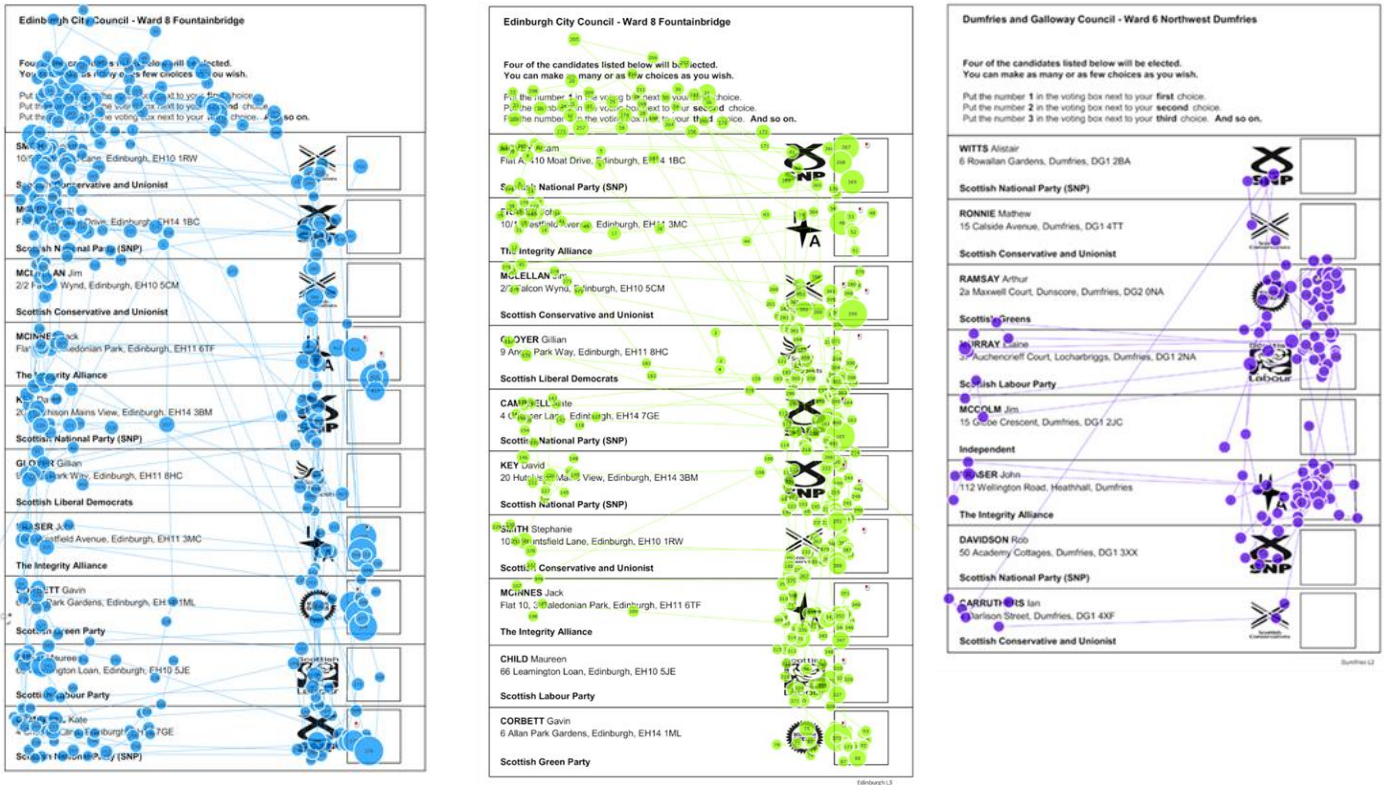
*Based on the 7 eye-tracking participants in Dumfries and 9 in Edinburgh*

The instructions and party names were the least looked at sections of the ballot paper overall. In eight cases participants looked at the instructions for less than three seconds[25], and in two cases did not look at them at all.

'Gaze plots', showing examples of the extent to which participants looked at the different sections of the form are shown in Figure 1 below. The first plot shows an example of a participant who had fixated on most of the different sections of the ballot paper and who fixated for slightly longer on the names and addresses than the party emblems. The second and third plots show examples of participants who did not fixate on all the different sections of the ballot paper and who have used the party emblems as much, if not more, than the names/addresses to find their preferred candidates.

[25] The average reading speed is three to four words per second.

**Figure 1: Eye-tracking interview gaze plots**




The eye-tracking data was also analysed for the extent to which participants looked at the different names on the list, to see if there was any suggestion that candidates at the bottom were less likely to be viewed than those at the top.

In general, participants spent slightly longer on average looking at the names towards the top of the list than those at the bottom (Table 7). However, it should be noted that in many cases participants would just scan the list of names until they found the name of the candidate they had been asked to vote for, which was in the top half of the list in four out of the six ballot papers tested (Table 5).

**Table 7: Average time spent looking at candidates by position on ballot paper**

| Position on ballot paper | Average length of gaze (seconds) |
|---|---|
| Top half | 1.2 |
| Bottom half | 0.9 |

*Based on the 16 eye-tracking participants*

Ten of the 16 participants looked at each of the candidate's names on the ballot paper, even if only very briefly. Among those who did not look at all the names, those not read were a mix of candidates from the top and bottom halves of the ballot paper (Table 8). However, as previously discussed, when casting their votes, participants were only looking for the specific candidate they had been asked to vote for, and after casting their vote for this candidate most participants said that they used the emblems rather than the names to help them find their preferred candidates, which might explain why these participants did not read all the names on the ballot paper.

**Table 8: Participants who did not look at all candidates on the ballot paper**

| Participant ID | Location | Ballot paper | Number of candidates not looked at | Position on the list of names not looked at (from the top) |
|---|---|---|---|---|
| 4 | Dumfries | Z-A | 4 out of 8 | 1, 2, 3 and 7 |
| 8 | Edinburgh | By lot | 1 out of 10 | 1 |
| 9 | Edinburgh | A-Z | 2 out of 10 | 2 and 9 |
| 11 | Edinburgh | By lot | 1 out of 10 | 10 |
| 14 | Edinburgh | A-Z | 1 out of 10 | 9 |
| 16 | Edinburgh | By lot | 2 out of 10 | 4 and 7 |

There was only one case, out of sixteen, where the eye-tracking data showed that a participant did not look at any of a candidate's information (either the name, address, party name or party emblem) – their eyes had not fixated at all on any information about the second candidate on the list on an A to Z paper, though there was no obvious reason for why this was. The rest of the participants had at least looked at one element of the information about each of the candidates on the list, even if only very briefly.

# Other issues identified

The focus of the testing was on the impact of the ordering of candidate names. However, a number of other issues emerged which either confirm the findings from previous research or are issues which may be worth exploring in more depth in future research. These include:

- Older participants (who are likely to be more familiar with the first-past-the-post system and voting by putting a single 'X' in a box), were more likely to:
  - spoil their ballots by putting multiple Xs or ticks (17 of the 66 participants aged 40+ did so, compared with 3 of the 52 participants aged 16-39)
  - not realise that they could vote for more than one candidate
  - be confused or uncomfortable with there being multiple candidates from the same party.
- The relatively high number of ballot papers (around 28 out of 97) which would be accepted as valid but which were in some way problematic as it seemed likely that the participant would have voted differently had they better understood the system. This was most commonly because they did not realise they could vote for more than one candidate from the same party or did not realise they could vote for more than one candidate. Other misunderstandings included thinking that it was only permissible to vote for 3 candidates, that it was compulsory to for vote for 3 candidates, or that it was compulsory to put a number against every candidate on the ballot (which could lead to a fairly random ordering of candidates past the first few). As noted above in relation to spoiled ballots, the profile of participants in this research was deliberately skewed towards those thought more likely to have problems and we would not expect this same level of difficulty across the whole electorate. Nonetheless, it highlights a need for continuing efforts to better inform and guide voters about STV.

- A confusion among participants with low literacy between Independent candidates and SNP candidates or the UK Independence Party.
- A perception that it was odd and/or unfair that Independent candidates did not have an emblem (as this might lead to them being passed over).

# Appendix A: Ballot paper examples

## Edinburgh ballot papers (A-Z, Z-A and by lot ordering)

**Edinburgh City Council - Ward 8 Fountainbridge**

**Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.**
**You can make as many or as few choices as you wish.**

Put the number **1** in the voting box next to your **first** choice.
Put the number **2** in the voting box next to your **second** choice.
Put the number **3** in the voting box next to your **third** choice. **And so on.**

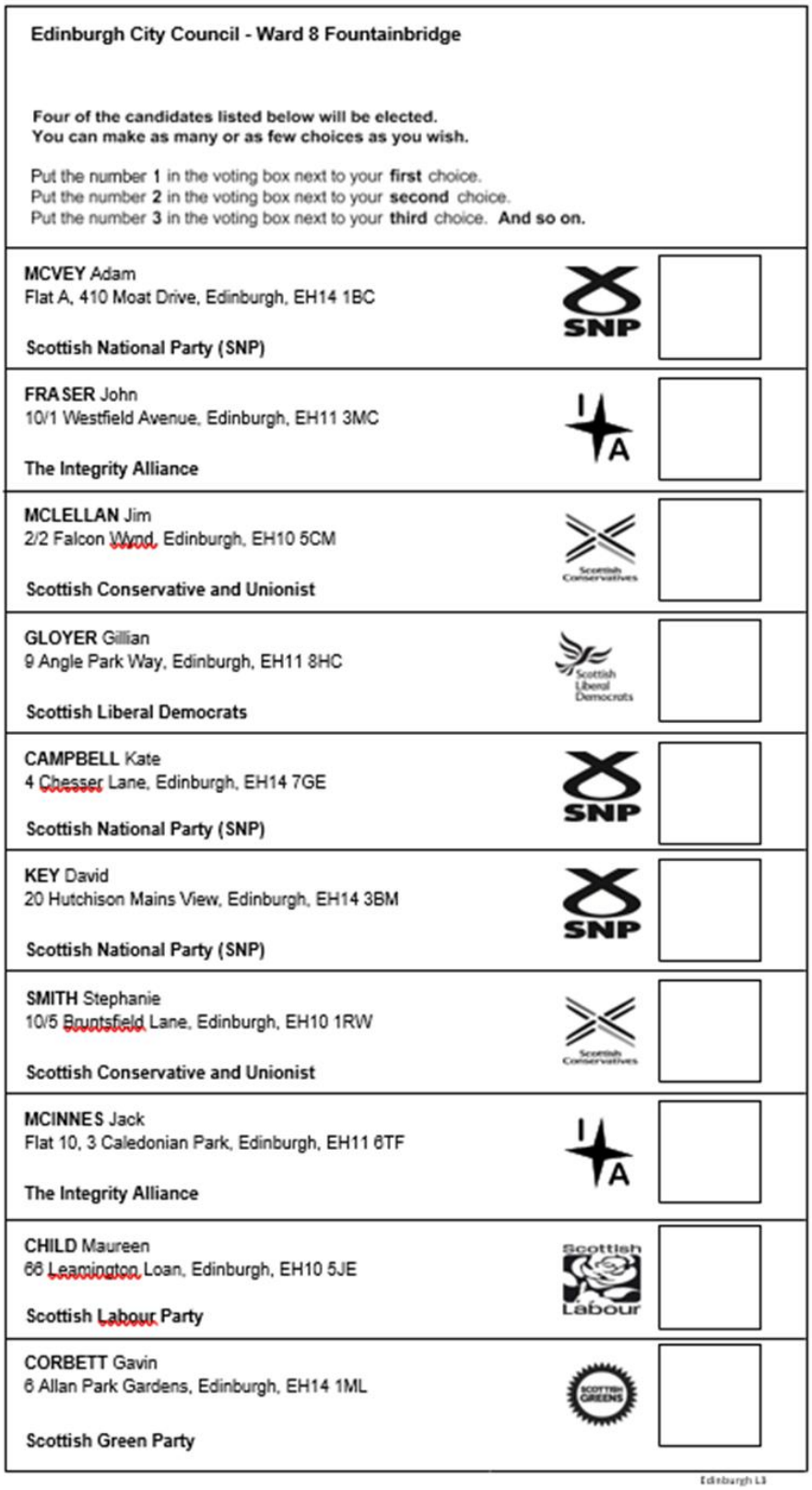
| | |
|---|---|
| **CAMPBELL** Kate<br>4 Chesser Lane, Edinburgh, EH14 7GE<br>**Scottish National Party (SNP)** | |
| **CHILD** Maureen<br>66 Leamington Loan, Edinburgh, EH10 5JE<br>**Scottish Labour Party** | |
| **CORBETT** Gavin<br>6 Allan Park Gardens, Edinburgh, EH14 1ML<br>**Scottish Green Party** | |
| **FRASER** John<br>10/1 Westfield Avenue, Edinburgh, EH11 3MC<br>**The Integrity Alliance** | |
| **GLOYER** Gillian<br>9 Angle Park Way, Edinburgh, EH11 8HC<br>**Scottish Liberal Democrats** | |
| **KEY** David<br>20 Hutchison Mains View, Edinburgh, EH14 3BM<br>**Scottish National Party (SNP)** | |
| **MCINNES** Jack<br>Flat 10, 3 Caledonian Park, Edinburgh, EH11 6TF<br>**The Integrity Alliance** | |
| **MCLELLAN** Jim<br>2/2 Falcon Wynd, Edinburgh, EH10 5CM<br>**Scottish Conservative and Unionist** | |
| **MCVEY** Adam<br>Flat A, 410 Moat Drive, Edinburgh, EH14 1BC<br>**Scottish National Party (SNP)** | |
| **SMITH** Stephanie<br>10/5 Bruntsfield Lane, Edinburgh, EH10 1RW<br>**Scottish Conservative and Unionist** | |

**Edinburgh City Council - Ward 8 Fountainbridge**

**Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.**
**You can make as many or as few choices as you wish.**

Put the number **1** in the voting box next to your **first** choice.
Put the number **2** in the voting box next to your **second** choice.
Put the number **3** in the voting box next to your **third** choice. **And so on.**

| | | |
|---|---|---|
| **SMITH** Stephanie<br>10/5 Bruntsfield Lane, Edinburgh, EH10 1RW<br>**Scottish Conservative and Unionist** | Scottish Conservatives | |
| **MCVEY** Adam<br>Flat A, 410 Moat Drive, Edinburgh, EH14 1BC<br>**Scottish National Party (SNP)** | SNP | |
| **MCLELLAN** Jim<br>2/2 Falcon Wynd, Edinburgh, EH10 5CM<br>**Scottish Conservative and Unionist** | Scottish Conservatives | |
| **MCINNES** Jack<br>Flat 10, 3 Caledonian Park, Edinburgh, EH11 6TF<br>**The Integrity Alliance** | IA | |
| **KEY** David<br>20 Hutchison Mains View, Edinburgh, EH14 3BM<br>**Scottish National Party (SNP)** | SNP | |
| **GLOYER** Gillian<br>9 Angle Park Way, Edinburgh, EH11 8HC<br>**Scottish Liberal Democrats** | Scottish Liberal Democrats | |
| **FRASER** John<br>10/1 Westfield Avenue, Edinburgh, EH11 3MC<br>**The Integrity Alliance** | IA | |
| **CORBETT** Gavin<br>6 Allan Park Gardens, Edinburgh, EH14 1ML<br>**Scottish Green Party** | Scottish Greens | |
| **CHILD** Maureen<br>66 Leamington Loan, Edinburgh, EH10 5JE<br>**Scottish Labour Party** | Scottish Labour | |
| **CAMPBELL** Kate<br>4 Chesser Lane, Edinburgh, EH14 7GE<br>**Scottish National Party (SNP)** | SNP | |



**Edinburgh City Council - Ward 8 Fountainbridge**

**Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.**
**You can make as many or as few choices as you wish.**

Put the number **1** in the voting box next to your **first** choice.
Put the number **2** in the voting box next to your **second** choice.
Put the number **3** in the voting box next to your **third** choice. **And so on.**

**MCVEY** Adam
Flat A, 410 Moat Drive, Edinburgh, EH14 1BC
**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**FRASER** John
10/1 Westfield Avenue, Edinburgh, EH11 3MC
**The Integrity Alliance**

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2/2 Falcon Wynd, Edinburgh, EH10 5CM
**Scottish Conservative and Unionist**

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9 Angle Park Way, Edinburgh, EH11 8HC
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**KEY** David
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10/5 Bruntsfield Lane, Edinburgh, EH10 1RW
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Flat 10, 3 Caledonian Park, Edinburgh, EH11 6TF
**The Integrity Alliance**

**CHILD** Maureen
66 Leamington Loan, Edinburgh, EH10 5JE
**Scottish Labour Party**

**CORBETT** Gavin
6 Allan Park Gardens, Edinburgh, EH14 1ML
**Scottish Green Party**

Edinburgh L3

## Stornoway ballot papers (A-Z, Z-A, and by lot ordering)

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar - Ward 7 Steòrnabhagh a Tuath**

**Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.**
**You can make as many or as few choices as you wish.**

Put the number **1** in the voting box next to your **first** choice.
Put the number **2** in the voting box next to your **second** choice.
Put the number **3** in the voting box next to your **third** choice. **And so on.**

**CRICHTON** Donald Finlayson
11 Market Cottages, Isle of Lewis, HS2 5CB

**Independent**

**FRASER** Ranald
99 Cearn Steinish, Stornoway, HS1 9LM

**Scottish Conservative and Unionist**

**MACKAY** Callum Iain
4b Seaforth Bay, Stornoway, HS1 7AT

**Independent**

**MACKAY** Flora
54 Coll Park, Isle of Lewis, HS2 2LH

**Independent**

**MACLEOD** Fiona
66 Newbattle Street, Isle of Lewis, HS2 2LH

**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**MCINNES** John
9b Urquhart Place, Stornoway, HS1 4CM

**The Integrity Alliance**

**MURRAY** Gordon
5 Cross Terrace, Stornoway, HS1 9CH

**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar - Ward 7 Steòrnabhagh a Tuath**

**Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.**
**You can make as many or as few choices as you wish.**

Put the number **1** in the voting box next to your **first** choice.
Put the number **2** in the voting box next to your **second** choice.
Put the number **3** in the voting box next to your **third** choice. **And so on.**

**MURRAY** Gordon
5 Cross Terrace, Stornoway, HS1 9CH

**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**MCINNES** John
9b Urquhart Place, Stornoway, HS1 4CM

**The Integrity Alliance**

**MACLEOD** Fiona
66 Newbattle Street, Isle of Lewis, HS2 2LH

**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**MACKAY** Flora
54 Coll Park, Isle of Lewis, HS2 2LH

**Independent**

**MACKAY** Callum Iain
4b Seaforth Bay, Stornoway, HS1 7AT

**Independent**

**FRASER** Ranald
99 Cearn Steinish, Stornoway, HS1 9LM

**Scottish Conservative and Unionist**

**CRICHTON** Donald Finlayson
11 Market Cottages, Isle of Lewis, HS2 5CB

**Independent**

**Comhairle nan Eilean Siar - Ward 7 Steòrnabhagh a Tuath**

**Four of the candidates listed below will be elected.**
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Put the number **3** in the voting box next to your **third** choice. **And so on.**

**MACKAY** Callum Iain
4b Seaforth Bay, Stornoway, HS1 7AT

**Independent**

**MACLEOD** Fiona
66 Newbattle Street, Isle of Lewis, HS2 2LH

**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**CRICHTON** Donald Finlayson
11 Market Cottages, Isle of Lewis, HS2 5CB

**Independent**

**MCINNES** John
9b Urquhart Place, Stornoway, HS1 4CM

**The Integrity Alliance**

**FRASER** Ranald
99 Cearn Steinish, Stornoway, HS1 9LM

**Scottish Conservative and Unionist**

**MURRAY** Gordon
5 Cross Terrace, Stornoway, HS1 9CH

**Scottish National Party (SNP)**

**MACKAY** Flora
54 Coll Park, Isle of Lewis, HS2 2LH

**Independent**

# Appendix B: Ficticious candidate leaflet

# Appendix C: Discussion Guide

**Local Government Ballot Testing Topic Guide**

**Glasgow/Edinburgh/Borders/Dumfries V1**

**Giving the participant the flyer**
[Invite the participant to sit down and hand them the flyer.]

We are going to start shortly, but first I'd like you to look at this flyer. In a minute I'm going to get you to complete a ballot paper as if you were voting in a local government election and I'm going to ask you to give your first vote to the person on this flyer so try to remember their name. [Give the participant a couple of minutes to read the flyer and then take it from them – busy yourself with notes from previous interview or getting papers ready for this one so not just observing them reading the flyer]

Ok, thanks, we're going to get started now.

**Introduction**

Introduce self, Ipsos MORI
We are conducting this research on behalf of the Electoral Commission about ballot papers (voting papers). The aim of this project is to explore whether ballot papers are easy to use, or whether certain features of ballot papers can be confusing. By doing this we can help make sure that ballot papers are as clear as possible for people who vote in the future.

We are not interested in your political views, just whether the ballot paper works and is easy to understand. There are no right or wrong answers, we're not testing you, we're testing the ballot paper.

Thank participants for agreeing to be interviewed; mention should take a maximum of c 30 minutes. £20 incentive as a thank you.

Anonymity of respondents and MRS (Market Research Society) code of conduct.

Privacy notice information

Reminder that taking part is voluntary and check happy to proceed on this basis.

Consent form

**Making their 'vote'**
**[Flyer]**
In a moment, I'm going to give you a ballot paper and I would like you to complete it as if this was the day of the local government election, and this was your area. Please complete the ballot paper as if you would if I was not here.

[If participant mentions using a postal vote in the past: For this research please imagine you are voting in a polling place]

As a reminder I would like you to give your first vote to the person on the flyer I gave you earlier. You can then use as many or as few of your other preferences as you would like.

**[No flyer]**
In a moment, I'm going to give you a ballot paper and I would like you to complete it as if this was the day of the local government election, and this was your area. Please complete the ballot paper as if you would if I was not here.

[If participant mentions using a postal vote in the past: For this research please imagine you are voting in a polling place]

Although I'm not interested in who you vote for, it will make it a more realistic test of the ballot paper if you treat it as 'real' and vote in the way you think you would actually vote. You can use as many or as few preferences as you would like.

**[All]**
Just work at your own pace. I will be looking to see how you get on. But, don't worry, this is not a test of you, it's a test of the ballot paper! One thing that is helpful for me to understand how you are getting on is for you to 'think aloud' and say what you are thinking about as you fill it in. [If necessary: give further instruction on 'thinking aloud']

[Give the participant the ballot paper]

*[INTERVIEWER: note any important comments made in think aloud, expressions, hesitations or body language.]*

**Interview**
I'd now like to chat to you about what you just filled in.

**Overall**

- How did you find that?
- Was it easy or difficult to fill in?
- Was anything confusing?
-

**Completing the ballot paper**

- How did you decide who [else] to vote for? [if flyer]
- How did you find the candidate you were looking for?
    - Probe on: Party emblem; party name; candidate name
    - Which was most useful?
- How easy or difficult was it for you to find the candidate(s) you were looking for?

**[LEAFLET]**

[If participant votes 'incorrectly']

- Do you remember the flyer we gave you? [show flyer if not]. We asked you to vote for John Fraser of The Integrity Alliance as your number 1 choice and you voted for [insert party].
- Why didn't you vote for them?
- Did you notice them on the ballot paper?

**Ordering issues**

- What were your first impressions of the layout of the ballot paper?
    - Anything you found confusing/didn't like?
    - Anything you found odd?

- What did you think about the order the candidates are listed? Did you notice it?

- [If noticed order] Did you think anything of it?

- [If not noticed order] looking at it now, which way do you think they have been ordered?

- [If not already mentioned] Did the order make it easy or difficult to find the candidate you wanted to vote for?

**Comparison with alternative treatments**

I'd now like to you to look at a slightly different version of the ballot paper.

[Give participant the ballot paper and give them a few minutes to read it]

- How does this version compare to the ballot paper you filled in?

[If not mentioned spontaneously] On this ballot paper the names of the candidates are in a different order.

- Would you find easier or more difficult to find the candidate(s) you wanted to vote for on this ballot paper? Why?

- If you used this ballot paper, do you think you would have filled it in any differently?
    - [If yes]: in what way?
    - Why would this version lead you fill it in differently?

I'm now going to show you a third version of the ballot paper.

[Give participant the ballot paper and give them a few minutes to read it]

- How does this version compare to the ballot paper you filled in?

[If not mentioned spontaneously] On this ballot paper the names of the candidates are in a different order.

- Would you find easier or more difficult to find the candidate(s) you wanted to vote for on this ballot paper? Why?

- If you used this ballot paper, do you think you would have filled it in any differently?
    - [If yes]: in what way?
    - Why would this version lead you fill it in differently?

- Overall, which design do you prefer?

- Finally, I'd just like to ask how interested you are in politics? Are you…
    - Very interested
    - Fairly interested
    - Not very interested
    - Not at all interested
    - Don't know

**Thanks**
Is there anything else that you would like to add, that hasn't already been mentioned?

**ENDS**

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colin.hockaday@ipsos.com

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## About Ipsos MORI Scotland

Ipsos MORI Scotland provides research focused on the distinct needs of policymakers and businesses in Scotland. We offer the full range of qualitative and quantitative research methodologies and have a detailed understanding of specific sectors in Scotland, their policy challenges and their research needs. The variety of research we conduct gives us a unique insight into many aspects of life in Scotland.