

FINAL REPORT

South Wales Central – National Assembly for Wales
Election 5th May 2016



Dr John Ault
18th May 2016

National Assembly for Wales Elections – May 5th 2016

Report on Election Observation – South Wales Central

Objectives

1. To objectively observe the electoral process across the South Wales Central region of the National Assembly for Wales.
2. To advise 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

A team of 28 observers, registered with the UK's Electoral Commission, made 239 separate observations in 223 different polling stations across the South Wales Central region of the National Assembly. These covered all three councils which make up the electoral region namely Cardiff, Rhondda Cynon Taff and the Vale of Glamorgan.

Each team was split into pairs to allow for objective observation and they then 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 fifteen and twenty 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. However, in some polling stations, mainly the most rural, this was not always possible due to limited footfall at some stations.

Each team of observers was contacted throughout the day by the central team to ensure that observation was as uniform as possible. All eight constituencies were observed to the following extent;¹

41 observations in Cardiff Central
51 observations in Cardiff North
36 observations in Cardiff South and Penarth
18 observations in Cardiff West

21 observations in the Vale of Glamorgan,

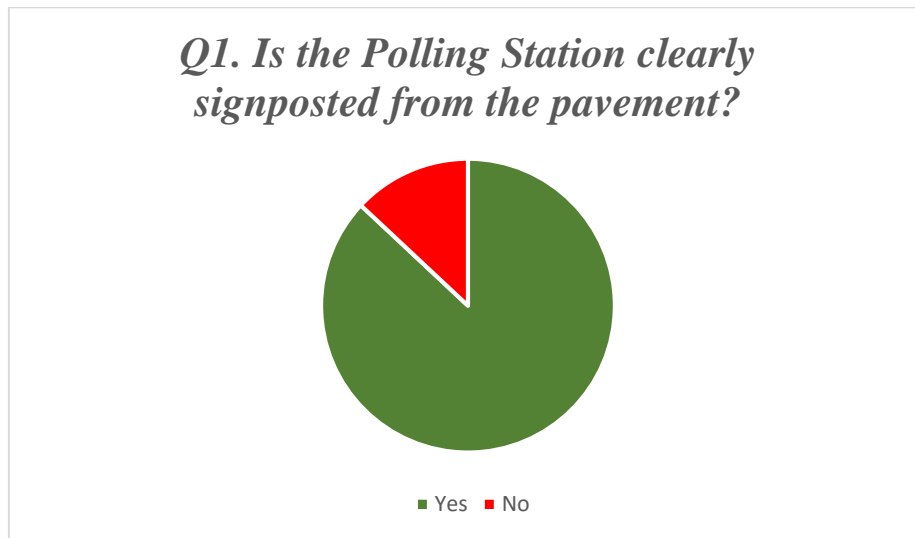
48 observations in Rhondda,
11 observations in Pontypridd
4 observations in Cynon Valley

¹ Some polling stations being visited more than once in Cardiff.

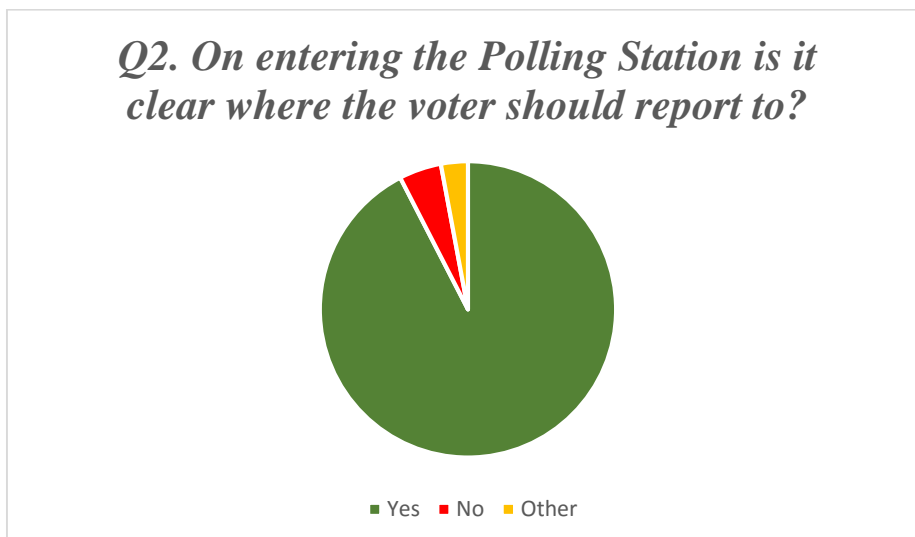
This constituted over 50% of all the polling stations in South Wales Central. This was predominantly in Cardiff but an extensive observation was also conducted in Rhondda constituency. The results have been anonymised across all three councils.

Results of the Observation

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

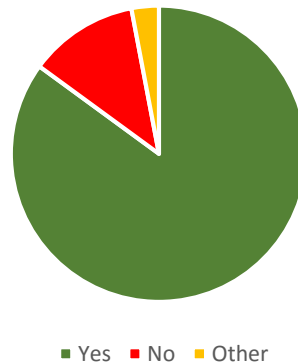


QUESTION 1: 13% of observations indicated that the polling station was not clearly identifiable from the main road, 87% identified that the polling station was highly visible. However, there were some issues over visibility that seemed to stem from lack of equipment to affix notices and also, due to weather conditions, some simply disappeared during the day.



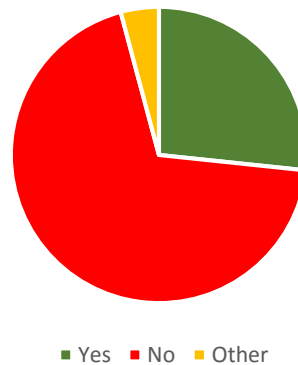
QUESTION 2: The main problems with reporting at polling stations centred around clarity in polling stations which had more than one ballot box covering separate polling districts.

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



QUESTION 3: 84% of observations indicated that access to the polling station was clear, whilst 12% indicated that access was not. These problems focused on step-free access which was not always available. Although many polling stations were fitted with ramps, in some areas these were not in place and in some cases access was poorly signed and/or signs had fallen down to block the access.

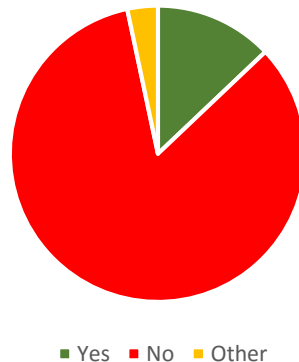
Q4. Did the polling staff ask to see your ID on arrival?



QUESTION 4: Although staff had clearly been informed that an observation team would be operating across the council areas in question, the formal procedure for identifying and then recording that observers had visited the polling station was not followed in the vast majority of cases. This may be understandable but, in some cases where ‘signing in’ procedures were being followed for observers they were also for other visits (e.g. police or council officers).

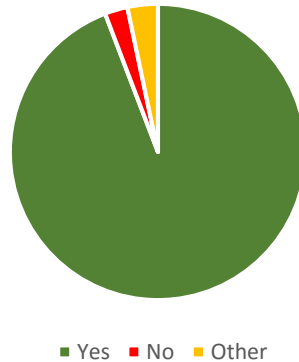
69% of observers did not have their credentials checked on arrival at the polling station although 8% of ‘Others’ did ask at some point during the observation. 27% checked the ID of observers on arrival at the desk in the polling station.

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 both an Electoral Commission badge which was numbered and a University of Exeter ID badge. 84% of polling stations did not record the ID details of the observers and only 13% did. In a number of cases this was not on the official form provided by the council.

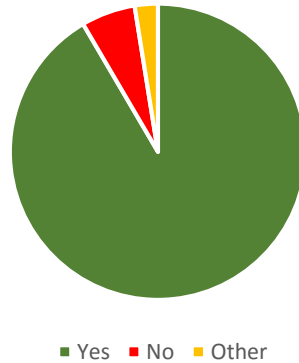
Q6. Are there two staff on duty in the polling station as you arrive?



QUESTION 6: Ten polling stations, 6%, did not have two members of polling staff on duty when observers arrived at the polling station. In some cases, this was because they were briefly occupied elsewhere, sometimes on the telephone and in some cases because the polling station was relatively quiet and the weather was warm and sunny.

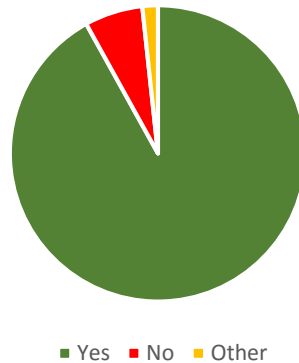
Only in four cases did this seem to be because a member of staff was not in attendance at the polling station. In two cases staff were present but permanently on the telephone on personal business and not able to conduct polling in a formal manner.

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 should be extremely clear but on 14 occasions (6%) ballot boxes were not sealed with the use of the green cable ties provided at all. In 6 cases (3%) either the ballot box was sealed with just one cable tie, suggesting that the others could be used to replace it, or was sealed with a less formal arrangement, such as tape. 92% of ballot boxes were sealed correctly.

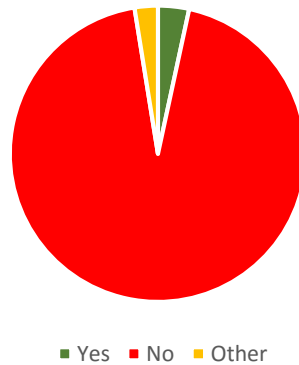
Q8. Is each polling booth equipped with an explanatory poster and a pen/pencil?



QUESTION 8: Although all polling stations had explanatory posters for the method of voting to be used, between the three separate ballot papers, in some cases this was not clearly shown in the polling booth itself (6%).

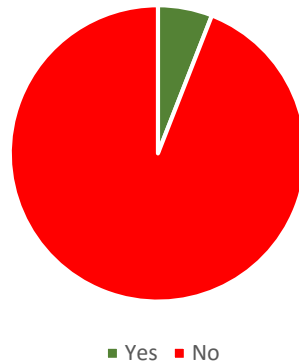
In some cases, mainly at the opening and closing of the polling station this issue was more clearly problematic. In two polling stations it was unclear that enough time had been spent preparing for the opening of the polling station and that this would naturally be remedied within the first hour of polling. Towards the end of polling day, some presiding officers appeared to be removing notices early, in preparation for the closing at 10pm.

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



QUESTION 9: This question was asked primarily to illicit whether improper political activity was taking place within the polling station.² In only 8 cases did observers identify literature within the polling station that could arguably have been biased towards one candidate. In some cases, party activists had parked cars extremely close to the entrance of the polling station. In one case a presiding officer displayed his/her support for a party by displaying a book mark with the leader of that party on it on the desk in the polling station. In 94% of cases there was no evidence of party political literature within the polling station.

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



QUESTION 10: On 14 separate occasions, (6%) of polling stations, our observer team identified so-called 'family voting'. OSCE/ODIHR, which monitors elections within the UK, describes 'family voting' as an 'unacceptable practice'.³ 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. In

² 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, AM or councillors' surgeries were on public display – advertising the names of candidates and/or parties.

³ <http://www.osce.org/>

several cases this was more than just husband and wife and included younger female family members also taking direction from an older man on how to cast their vote. In all cases there was little attempt to hide this practice and only on two occasions did polling staff intercede to prevent it. Only one was successful in preventing it.

However, in one other case, the observers also identified one older gentleman collecting his ballot papers and then handing them to a younger man to cast. This was in plain sight and there was no attempt to conceal this activity. This act should be considered as an offence of personation and/or multiple voting.⁴

OTHER COMMENTS

We also asked the observers to assess the activities of party tellers outside polling stations. In the event of there being very few tellers at the polling stations that we observed this information is not statistically relevant so we have decided not to include it in the final observation report.

On several occasions there were complaints from voters that they had been approached by tellers before they entered the polling station and our team identified this activity as well. In one polling station, with only one means of entry, tellers were insisting on number being taken before voters were granted access.

Although we did observe that many ballot boxes became full, especially the more modern plastic variety, this did not impede the election as far as we could tell. It did cause some frustration for polling staff and the elector at times due to the fact that many voters sometimes found it difficult to fully cast their ballot.

CONCLUSION

We would like to thank the staff of the three councils for their support and encouragement in managing the observation at what is a very busy time for elections staff with two large scale concurrent elections and three ballot papers for the voter to complete.

We can advise on specific instances where we observed specific issues that the three councils may wish to investigate further at their request.

FURTHER INFORMATION

A complete overview map of the polling stations that were visited can be found at:

[NAFW Polling Stations Map.](#)

⁴ http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0005/149729/List-of-electoral-offences.pdf