Annex A

Study methodology

Scope of the study

A.1 The research here looks at how government agencies and departments interact with citizens using first-use or main forms. Our scope excluded:

- forms primarily designed to be sent to businesses or to public sector agencies;
- complex forms which citizens would tend to need advisors or intermediaries to handle (as with most legal services forms); and
- follow-up forms, which agencies send out to request detailed information when answers on a standard form suggest that a citizen's situation is unusual or more complex. (For instance, the DVLA has a large number of further enquiry forms that are sent to people whose applications indicate a particular health condition, in order to gather detailed information assuring them that the person can safely drive a vehicle).

A.2 Our approach used three main research methods, described in more detail below:

- a census of government forms for citizens (results discussed in Part 1);
- research on the administrative background in agencies originating six case study forms (results discussed in Part 2); and
- focus groups or qualitative interview research on the same six forms (results discussed in Part 3).

The census of government forms

A.3 To gain a complete picture of central government forms we conducted a census, using agency Web sites to identify forms and download paper copies. We contacted agencies to request a minority of forms by post. (In a small number of cases the download version of forms is somewhat different from the conventionally-issued paper versions. But pilot investigations showed that it would have been impracticable within available time and resources to acquire so many forms. Asking for all conventional copies would also have imposed an extra burden on agencies). We excluded from this census groups of forms covered by the categories mentioned in paragraph A.1 above, leaving a set of 519 forms used for direct 'first use' interactions with citizens. **Figure A1** shows the number of forms by policy area. We believe our coverage is comprehensive.

A1 The number of forms across policy areas in our census

Policy area	Frequency	Percent
Legal	138	26.6
Taxation and duty	81	15.6
Welfare benefits	70	13.5
Transport	58	11.2
Land and property	56	10.8
Other	55	10.6
Immigration and visa	34	6.6
Education	18	3.5
Health	9	1.7
Total	**519**	**100.0**

Source: National Audit Office

A.4 A census of this kind focuses on objective indicators that can be coded for with a high measure of reliability across coders. Our coders were 12 LSE post-graduate students, who were carefully trained, inducted and supervised. They analysed each of the forms identified, using a Web-based system which ensured full coverage of all aspects of forms and facilitated close management of researchers to ensure inter-coder reliability.

A.5 We focused on three distinct aspects of government forms:

- *Purpose, design and layout*. We coded 60 characteristics of all forms, of which 40 items concerned *design and layout* and 20 features of forms that were inherent in the *purpose of the form* and the transaction it governed.
- On the *depth of personal information* required by forms, we identified ten basic categories of information from our analyses of the six case study forms. These were: Personal and contact details; Health information; Social welfare details; Employment and National Insurance details; Personal finances; Non-financial assets; Education information; Nationality details; Visa and

immigration information; Criminal record etc; and Taxation details. Each of these main areas was then divided into three or four sub-areas.

- On the *breadth of information* required by forms, we looked at whether government forms asked only about respondents or also about other people, such as partners, family members or professionals familiar with the applicant's situation.

Our complete coding frame is available for free download from the LSE/UCL Website at **www.GovernmentOnTheWeb.org**

Research on the administrative background in agencies

A.6 To understand how agencies design and implement forms we looked at the organizational background for our six case study forms, discussed above in Part 2 and also in Annex B. We undertook face-to-face and phone interviews with relevant staff, collected documentation, and visited offices and sites where forms are processed. In some cases we talked to relevant external actors, such as the Post Office for premium fee services, and to private sector contractors running preliminary forms-screening or agencies' IT systems. All interviews were taped, except for some of those conducted with Inland Revenue personnel. Interviews followed a pattern which varied with the interviewee's role in the forms process. We thank all the staff who kindly shared their expertise with us.

A.7 We also undertook three group discussion sessions with representatives from a range of interest groups that have been active in commenting to government on forms design and implementation issues. We thank the representatives of the following organizations for generously giving their advice and views:

Consumer's Association Council	National Consumer's
Help the Aged	Plain English Campaign
Mind	Royal National Institute for the Blind
Mencap	Citizens Advice Bureau
Commission for Racial Equality	Federation of Small Businesses
Institute of Chartered Accountants	Association of Chartered and Certified Accountants
London Chamber of Commerce	

A.8 We also discussed local implementation issues on three forms with personnel in local organizations helping us contact respondents. We thank contacts at Age Concern (Edinburgh), the Edinburgh Chamber of Commerce, Age Concern (Leeds), Barking College and Leyton Sixth Form College for their input. Additionally two of our focus groups on the Attendance Allowance form were undertaken with local charity staff and social workers working with the elderly in Leeds and Edinburgh (see below).

A.9 We used research visits for other reasons to the USA, Canada and Australia as an opportunity to collect information on government forms there, as well covering practices in a number of other countries using Web and phone research.

Focus groups and qualitative interviews

A.10 For five of our forms we conducted focus groups, whose formats varied somewhat with the nature of the form and its users. In each case we identified relevant groups who use the form, contacted potential participants ahead of the session, and sent those people agreeing to participate a letter explaining the session and a pack of documents. We asked all participants to look through the form they were to discuss in detail. With the shorter forms participants were asked to complete them and fill in a short questionnaire, collected in at the session. (Where forms were completed, they were checked for mistakes and handed back to participants at the sessions). The focus group sessions varied in size from 6 to 18 people, with the extremes reflecting some logistical difficulties leading to under- or over-recruitment in particular locations. But most sessions included between 8 and 12 people.

A.11 For each of the two short forms filled in by the general public, the passport and photocard driving license applications, we used a single focus group, broadly reflecting the working population as a whole. We selected 30 people to whom we sent the forms and an accompanying questionnaire to complete. From each set of 30 replies, we then selected 12 people who could come to the discussion session. (Respondents not invited to the group session had their forms returned and were paid a small fee).

A.12 For each of the three long forms filled in by specific types of people we conducted several groups in different parts of the country:

Form studied	Group composed of	Location
Attendance Allowance	18 elderly people	Edinburgh
	12 elderly people	Leeds
Attendance Allowance and new pilot version	10 care workers	Edinburgh
	9 care workers	Leeds
Income tax self-assessment core form and self-employed pages	6 new self-employed people	Edinburgh
	8 more experienced self-employed people	Edinburgh
Self-assessment and employment pages	8 higher tax rate employees	Central London
Student financial support forms HE1 and HE2	12 Year Thirteen school students	Barking, East London
Student financial support pilot form PN1	12 Year Thirteen students	Leytonstone, Essex

A.13 All of the focus group sessions worked intensively through the form being considered, starting with participants' first impressions, then covering each section of the form, then looking at the guidance notes and any other elements in form packs (such as fees leaflets), and ending with overall impressions. Where appropriate we also discussed issues such as: supporting documents or photographs; getting forms counter-signed; ways of submitting forms; premium fee services; experiences of Internet or phone submission; how agencies help people in completing the form; and contacts with agencies. The discussions were always business-like and focused on specifics.

A.14 For the European Parliament ballot paper, which is a one-use form, filled in individually and in secret, we judged the focus group approach less appropriate. Instead we conducted an election simulation in London followed by qualitative interviews. Some 30 respondents were recruited individually in the street against a quota frame, controlling chiefly for social characteristics. Respondents were asked to 'vote' using a ballot box and the 1999 European elections ballot paper for London. Immediately afterwards they were given a qualitative interview for around 10 minutes, covering 11 specific questions about the ballot's design and how people used it.

Annex B

The administrative background for the six case study forms, and comparing UK forms with those in other countries

B.1 The first six sections of this Annex provide some additional organizational information about the case study forms included here. The final section briefly compares UK government forms with those in some comparable liberal democracies.

The Passport application form

B.2 This form is used by up to 5.5 million people a year to apply for new or renewed passports from the UK Passport Service, an executive agency of the Home Office. Passports only need to be renewed every ten years, so people are often not familiar with the application form. Around four fifths of British people hold passports, in contrast to some other countries like the USA where only a minority have them.

B.3 The form consists of four sides of A4 in a light brown ('terracotta') font and layout designed for scanning. Users need to fill in the whole of the form by entering individual letters and numbers carefully in designated slots. There are also two or three signature boxes where signatures must be wholly inside the box for it to be accepted. Most users of the forms have to enclose or supply supporting documentation, such as previous passports, birth or marriage certificates. In addition, those sending in forms by mail must enclose the correct fee for the type of passport requested. A separate fees leaflet included in the passport application pack lists 19 different fees, but the most basic ones are £33 for a first passport or renewal for adults, and £19 for children, assuming that applications are posted in to the Agency. The five Passport Offices offer an over-the-counter one-week service for an additional £30 and same day services for an extra £45. The fees charged are posted on the Service's website at **www.ukps.gov.uk**, but only in a PDF file.

B.4 Since 1999-2000 the Passport Service has also offered a 'check and send' service route via the Post Office. For the payment of an additional £5 fee, users can have their application form checked by Post Office counter staff and pay the fees needed over the counter. If the counter staff detect any mistakes on the form, users can go away and redo their forms, and Post Office staff will recheck the form free within the same fee, for up to one month. **Figure B1** shows that the mix of submission routes chosen by applicants has shifted markedly in recent years towards the Post Office route. The Passports Service also accords priority to applications received via the Post Office, so that if two applications are received at a regional office via the Post Office or in the mail, the 'check and send' service application will be processed first. Since many people leave applying for passports until quite late, but the counter service at Passport Offices is much more expensive, this perceived advantage is an inducement to use the Post Office service.

B1 Changes in how passport applications were submitted, 1998-2003

Year	% posted	% via Post Office counters	% at Passport Service Offices	Total %	Number of applications
1998-1999	89	0	11	100	4,836,000
1999-2000	72	18	10	100	5,263,000
2000-2001	68	22	10	100	4,409,000
2001-2002	58	33	9	100	5,627,000
2002-2003	50	42	8	100	5,537,000

NOTE

The number of applications is rounded to the nearest thousand.

Source: UK Passport Service

B.5 Once forms are submitted either via the mail, or over the counter in Passport Service offices, or via the Post Office, they are processed initially by Siemens Business Systems (SBS), the UK Passport Service's IT supplier. SBS scan the forms and determine that there is a full application with all the correct elements needed, including going back to customers who have made mistakes to rectify them. Complete applications are then passed to the Passport Service for their staff to decide whether a passport can be issued.

The Photocard Driving Licence application

B.6 This wallet-sized card (and its paper counterpart) is issued to around 6 million people annually by the Driver and Vehicle Licensing Agency, an executive agency of the Department of Transport based in Swansea. The old paper licenses (issued before December 1999) lacked any photographic identification. They are still held by many drivers. Photocard licences were introduced on a gradual basis from July 1998. Now all new and replacement applications result in a photocard license together with its paper counterpart. Photocard licenses are designed to be easily carried in wallets and purses. In situations where the police or others ask to see a licence, people must produce both the photocard licence and the paper counterpart (which alone contains details such as disqualifications and endorsements). Existing drivers need to exchange their licenses if their old ones expire, if they lose them or their driving status has changed, or if they change their address. Some citizens have begun seeking photocard driving licenses because they make it easier to travel abroad within the EU, and also because they tend to be used as a means of identification within the UK.

B.7 The old photocard application form (called D750, used until early 2003) consisted of a two-sided A4 sheet, predominantly green in colour. People additionally had to fill in an application for a driving license form, which was a four-sided A4 sheet, including guidance notes. The two forms requested some of the same information, such as name, address and information on eyesight and hearing. These two forms have now been merged into one (see previous paragraph). A few elements of the new photocard application form (such as the photograph and signature box) are scanned in, but the rest of the form is re-keyed. The form has a limited number of questions and boxes arranged in sections - 'Your details', 'Your eyesight and hearing', 'The license you want', 'Confirming your identity'. The rest of the form deals with the enclosure (on a sticky patch) of an up-to-date photograph of the applicant, which must be counter-signed by a witness to the applicant's identity.

B.8 The form can be obtained from Post Offices or from local DVLA offices (of which there are 40). It can be returned by mail, or over the counter at the DVLA offices. Alternatively, there is a 'premium fee' service where people pay the Post Office an additional fee of £4.00 to check the application and necessary documents. DVLA also pays the Post Office a small transaction fee for each successful, complete application received for processing. Most users of the premium service route do not need to have their supporting identification documents sent on to DVLA - the Post Office counter staff can check them on the spot, fill in appropriate 'official use' parts of the application, and hand the ID documents back. The DVLA's local offices also provide this facility. It is attractive to customers because they do not lose control over their key documents and can retain them for other uses. It also avoids any risk of documents being lost.

The Income Tax Self-Assessment return

B.9 People who pay tax at the higher rate of tax and those who have earnings or incomes (such as property income) which are not taxed at source under Pay as You Earn (PAYE) must complete and send in this form annually to Inland Revenue. At July 2003 the complete self-assessment population was approximately 9.5 million, of which some 8.5 million people were due to submit an individual self-assessment form. The remaining population includes trusts and partnership returns. Of the 8.5 million, 6.8 million are employed or self-employed. We restricted our attention to people who are employees paying the higher rate tax or who receive income from self-employment for some or all of their work. They account for 4.92 million of the 8.5 million individuals filing returns, around 57 per cent of the total - **see Figure B2 overleaf**. Inland Revenue is a non-ministerial department responsible to the Chancellor of the Exchequer.

B.10 The tax return consists of a core 10 page form which covers incomes received from interest or shares, taxable pensions and benefits, life insurance and small amounts of other income. It also covers tax relief for some pension contributions, for charitable giving and other matters, and Children's Tax Credit. Other material covers where repayments should be sent, the returnee's assessment of their tax liability, and questions about previous years tax details. (The first two pages of the core is taken up with explanatory and warning text and with a checklist of other parts of the form). Employees need to complete a further two pages and self-employed people must fill in up to four pages. On many page, however, there are filter questions, so that someone ticking 'No' does not need to fill in the rest of the page. But new users may have to read a large amount of material that does not relate to them. All three parts of the form come with a lengthy explanatory leaflet containing notes and guidance in double column pages, and using a large number of words. **Figure B3 overleaf** shows the number of questions on the forms and that the guidance covers a large number of words.

B2 A breakdown of individuals due to file self-assessment returns at July 2003

This study covers 4.92 million self-assessment filers, shown in the grey-shaded cells

Individuals with income from	All individuals (Millions)	*Approximate % of all individuals*	Higher rate individuals (Millions)	*Approximate % of higher rate Individuals*
Employment and no self-employment	3.7	*43*	1.82	*76*
Self-employment and no employment	2.6	*31*	0.2	*8*
Both employment and self-employment	0.5	*6*	0.117	*5*
Neither employment nor trade sources	1.7	*20*	0.263	*11*
Total submitted	**8.5**	***100***	**2.4**	***100***

NOTE

Numbers are rounded and approximate. The table reflects the number of individual self-assessment taxpayers as at July 2003, *excluding* the population covered by Trusts, partnership returns, and the table necessarily involves only a snapshot at one point in time: both the numbers and composition of individual filers change on a daily basis.

Source: Inland Revenue

B3 The length of the income tax self-assessment forms and accompanying guidance notes (for versions included in this study)

Forms	Pages	Questions	Guidance notes	Pages	Words
Core form	10	146	Core form	34	44,200
Employees	2	44	Employment	8	10,400
Self-employed	4	94	Self-employment	11	14,300
Total	**16**	**284**	**Total**	**53**	**68,900**

NOTE

We have assumed a standard 1300 words per page in the guidance leaflet.

Source: LSE analysis

B.11 The return is issued to taxpayers in April and must be sent back by 31 January of the following year. If the return is sent to Inland Revenue by 30 September then the department will calculate the tax bill for the taxpayer. If the return is sent between October and the end of January, taxpayers have to calculate the amount of tax they owe for themselves, and the Revenue supplies a further 17 page tax calculation guide with all forms for this purpose. The guide involves people filling in up to 139 different calculation boxes, and completing calculations such as adding up amounts and multiplying by fractions. Around 3.5 million people return forms in the October to January period and thus would need to look at this calculation guide. In 2001/02 around 900,000 people (representing 10% of all returns) failed to return their forms by the January deadline attracting penalties of around £100 each for late submission. Most forms are returned by mail or by delivery to local tax offices.

B.12 The Inland Revenue introduced an Internet filing service for individuals in April 2000. In 2002-3 the number of e-returns rose to nearly 325,000, more than four times the previous year's level, and 4 per cent of the total returns.

B.13 The Self-Assessment return is not currently scanned. The form is laid out for users to enter information in boxes, which are numbered in a complicated way (for instance, question number 10.23 is the 23rd box of question 10). The different parts of the forms have margins which are colour coded, for instance pink for employment and orange for self-employment, and the same colour codes are used in the guidance leaflet. However, most users have at most one or two extra sections to fill in, and consequently the colour coding plays a relatively limited role in guiding them through their own form.

The Attendance Allowance application form

B.14 The Attendance Allowance is a benefit paid to people aged over 65 who because of illness or mental frailty or a disability need help or assistance in order to be able to live their daily lives at home. The top six disabilities in May 2003 attracting awards were arthritis (more than double the numbers under any other heading), frailty, mental health causes, heart disease, Parkinson's disease, and stroke-related causes. The current form issued by the Department for Work and Pensions comes in two Parts, the first of which (coloured blue) is 14 pages long and includes 128 detailed questions, mainly about the applicant's relationship with the Department, and a little about people who might vouch for their condition. The second part (coloured pink) is 20 pages long with 140 questions. Part 2 asks in depth about the applicant's medical condition and abilities to do various tasks unaided, such as getting up, getting washed, preparing and eating meals, and so on. The form includes large blank boxes where people are invited to explain their illness or disability 'in your own words'. Applicants also have to supply the names and addresses of people who can vouch for their disabilities or the effect of illness, such as their doctor, care worker, and a member of their family or friend. (There is an additional, somewhat simpler version of the form designed for use by people who are medically recognized as being terminally ill, called the Special Rules form, which is not covered here).

B.15 The form must be returned by post to the Department for Work and Benefits where the first part goes to an administrative section and the second is considered by a decision-maker, normally an Executive Officer. The decision-maker will assess the form and contact one or more of the persons named there for corroboration and additional information. The official will then issue a decision to refuse the application, or to pay benefit at a lower rate, or to pay benefit at a higher rate. Decisions to reject or to pay only the lower rate of benefit are often appealed by applicants, in which case the paper forms and supporting documentation go before an appeals committee. Once benefits have begun to be paid they normally continue indefinitely, except if the old person receiving them goes into hospital when they are suspended. Benefits are rarely if ever reviewed unless there is some reason to suspect fraud. Applications are filed on paper in a depository in Nelson, and of the very many bits of information supplied by applicants only four elements are keyed into the department's computer systems. Forms cost £40.14 each to process in September 2002.

B.16 The current Attendance Allowance is admitted by the department to be a difficult form for old people to fill in on their own, especially for those who are becoming mentally frail. But the department argues that in virtually all cases, applicants are unlikely to complete the form unaided. Officials believe that elderly people will almost always be assisted to fill in the details needed and to provide a description of their condition by friends (who might be other elderly people), by other family members (such as a son or daughter), by a care worker or a health professional, or by someone from one of the charities working with old people (such as Age Concern). The department does not currently hold any systematic data on how many forms are filled in by old people who have these different levels of assistance, nor on whether some old people perhaps fill in the forms on their own, or attempt to do so and then give up. These issues have not been a focus of survey research or investigation by the department.

B.17 The Department for Work and Pensions is currently pilot-testing an alternative shorter version of the form (see Box 11). The new form has been developed in response to widespread dissatisfaction with the old form, particularly its length and its repetitive nature, expressed by the Public Accounts Committee, the Social Security Select Committee, in Ministerial correspondence, through customer complaints and by the various advice agencies. In 1996, the Disability Alliance were commissioned by Help the Aged to produce a report which surveyed 600 advice agencies. Its title *Endurance Test: Older People's Experience of Claiming Attendance Allowance* summed up the critical findings. The new pilot form drops all questions about methods of payment; the benefit will be paid the same way as the pension. This change was made possible by using the Departmental Central Index, a common enquiry service which looks across the DWP's different record-keeping IT systems. It seems likely that some version of the pilot form will replace the current Attendance Allowance form in the near future. DWP have also developed a shorter claim pack that is more personalised to the individual circumstances of the applicant. In addition, the Department has introduced two multi-service advice and information guides, one called the *'Pensioners' Guide'*[2] and the other covering *'Are you over 50?'*[3]

2 Department for Work and Pensions 'Pensioner's guide - England and Wales.'

3 Department for Work and Pensions 'Are you over 50?'

Applications by students for financial support in higher education

B.18 The Department for Education and Skills currently issues a two part form (called HE1 and HE2) which must be completed by all students in England and Wales starting higher education and wishing to apply for financial support - that is, payment of their main tuition fees by local authorities, or for local authority assistance with paying university tuition fees and with living expenses, or most widely for government loans to assist with living expenses. Once a student's local authority has determined their eligibility, the loans are administered by the Student Loans Company (SLC). The HE1 forms determine eligibility, and the HE2 form determines entitlement to financial support, mainly focusing on the financial background of the student's parents. The forms are issued in the spring of each year to prospective new students (see Box 17), and must normally be filled in together by them and their parents. Some duplication exists because of the need to link the two forms, and capture any changes in application circumstances (such as course changes). Many students whose parents are in upper income brackets may choose to complete only the first, non-means tested part of the HE2 form applying for a student loan. Because these students or their parents may feel that they would receive little or no means-tested assistance, they can avoid the second part which deals with the provision of support for tuition fees and the additional loan element, and requires potentially extensive details of parental incomes. Although 84 per cent of applicants using the forms are school students living with their parents, one sixth of applicants are not - principally mature students with partners and/or families. Because the forms need to be comprehensive, there will be questions on each form which may not be applicable to some types of students.

B.19 The two forms are accompanied by guidance notes totalling 24 pages, plus a more general DfES booklet *Financial Support for Higher Education Students* that has 79 pages. In addition, the Department provides information about the forms on its Web site. Many local authorities send out advisors to schools in the spring of each year to explain to students and their parents how to fill in the forms and how the system of financial support for students in higher education works. Schools often organize additional sessions for students and parents, and year and form tutors may assist Year 13 students in completing the HE1 and HE2 forms on time and in an accurate way.

B.20 The Department funds local authorities for the costs they incur in providing financial assistance to higher education students and in administering this system. Hence it has been concerned to ensure that councils in England make decisions on a standardized basis with the same information in front of them. Initially when the current system of funding was introduced, councils issued their own forms, which varied a good deal in the information collected and the format that it was in. As a result in 2000/1 the department issued the first standard-pattern HE1 and HE2 forms, which local education authorities could initially adopt or not as they chose. In 2001/2 the forms were revised and made mandatory for local authorities to use. From the 2004/5 academic year, the Department intends that the HE1 and HE2 forms will be replaced for beginning students by the new PN1 form (see Box 12). In addition to a focus group with school students on the main HE1 and HE2 paper forms, we were able to run a group on the pilot version of the new integrated (PN1) form for this study.

B.21 The current system is a paper-based one. However, as part of the Prime Minister's e-government initiative (under which all public services must be available on-line by 2005), the department has been developing an electronic application method. The on-line system seeks to present to applicants only those questions that apply to them. It also aims to offer more intuitive help than the paper-based forms, reducing the need for applicants to consult the extensive guidance notes issued with the existing forms.

The European Parliament ballot paper

B.22 The members of the European Parliament (which meets in Brussels and Strasbourg) are elected every five years on a fixed timetable. In 1999 for the first time the 84 MEPs in England, Scotland and Wales were chosen using a regional list system of proportional representation (PR). A different PR system, the single transferable vote, already in use in Northern Ireland, continued unchanged. These systems will be re-used in June 2004. The constituencies are the nine government standard regions in England, plus Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland. In each of these large areas a number of MEPs are elected together, ranging in 1999 from 11 in the largest regions to four in the smallest English region and three in Northern Ireland.

B.23 The regional list system of PR works as follows. Each party presents a list of its candidates ranked in an order determined by the party apparatus in accordance with its internal constitution or rule book. (Some parties may use internal elections to decide this ranking, while others use selection committees). The votes cast by electors for each party are then added up and the party with most votes is allocated the first seat, which goes to the candidate at the top of its list (that is, the person the party has ranked number one). The winning party's total vote is now divided by two and compared with all the other parties' votes. On this new basis, the party that now has the highest amount of votes is allocated the next seat, and the same process of adding one to its divisor (assuming all start with a divisor of one) is applied to it. By continuing this process until all the available seats have been allocated, parties' seats are as proportionately matched to their vote shares as is feasible. There are two key limits on how accurate this matching can be:

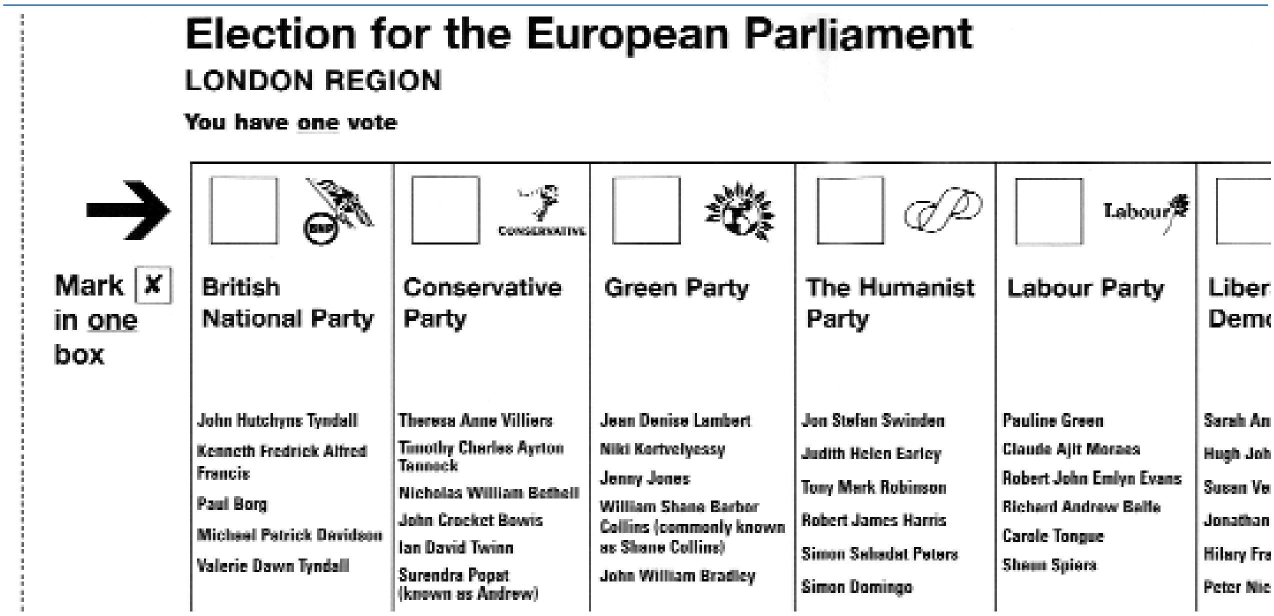
(i) the number of seats in the regions, with more seats helping an accurate match of party vote shares with seats, and fewer seats inhibiting it; and

(ii) the share of the total vote fragmented across very small 'other' parties (or individuals standing alone) which cannot garner enough support to win any seats.

B.24 Voters using the regional list PR system have to look at ballot papers which are larger and perhaps more complex-looking than the traditional ballots for Westminster or council elections in England **(Figure B4)**. The act of voting itself is not complex. Electors can cast only a single vote, by marking a cross in the box for their chosen party (or individual independent candidate). But the ballot paper has a lot of information on it, including the names of every single candidate for all the parties contesting the election and those of individual independent candidates. In 1999 almost every party put up a candidate for all available seats, even though a party would need to secure around 91 per cent of the vote to elect them all. This style of ballot paper may be less unusual for voters in Northern Ireland (which holds many elections using another PR method called the Single Transferable Vote or STV). It also may become more familiar to electors in Scotland, Wales and London (where important elections have been held since 1999 or 2000 using a further proportional method, called the Additional Member System).

B.25 The European Parliament ballot paper design was prescribed in secondary legislation in April 1999 by the Home Office (which was at that time responsible for policy on the conduct of national elections), after conducting some research with academic and social research consultants. These consultations influenced the decision to go with a very wide form in landscape format, and to include an arrow on the left of the ballot paper indicating where people should cast their votes. The design of the ballot paper and the writing of secondary legislation had to take place extremely quickly, from January to April 1999, and was completed only a month before the start of the election campaign. The Home Office also undertook a publicity campaign for the 1999 elections that involved sending a leaflet explaining the new system to every household, (at a total cost of £3.5 million, or around 8 pence per elector). The turnout at the 1999 election was just 24 per cent, around 10 percentage points lower than the previous European Parliament election, held in 1994 - reflecting wider declines in turnout across all kinds of elections in the UK at this period.

B4



Election for the European Parliament

LONDON REGION

You have one vote

Mark X in one box	British National Party	Conservative Party	Green Party	The Humanist Party	Labour Party	Liber… Dem…
	John Hutchyns Tyndall Kenneth Fredrick Alfred Francis Paul Borg Michael Patrick Davidson Valerie Dawn Tyndall	Theresa Anne Villiers Timothy Charles Ayrton Tannock Nicholas William Bethell John Crocket Bowis Ian David Twinn Surendra Popat (known as Andrew)	Jean Denise Lambert Niki Kortvelyessy Jenny Jones William Shane Barber Collins (commonly known as Shane Collins) John William Bradley	Jon Stefan Swinden Judith Helen Earley Tony Mark Robinson Robert James Harris Simon Sahadat Peters Simon Domingo	Pauline Green Claude Ajit Moraes Robert John Emlyn Evans Richard Andrew Balfe Carole Tongue Shaun Spiers	Sarah An… Hugh Joh… Susan Ve… Jonathan… Hilary Fra… Peter Nic…

Source: LSE analysis

B.26 For the 2004 election responsibility for the design of the ballot paper was transferred to the Lord Chancellor's Department (LCD) in 2002. In the June 2003 government reshuffle the departmental responsibility passed to the Department of Constitutional Affairs (DCA). The Electoral Commission, an independent executive and advisory body, advises the Department on whether changes are needed in electoral law, but it is up to DCA ministers to decide what action to take on the advice given. LCD had already decided in consultation with stakeholders and following a Home Office recommendation in the review of the 1999 election to issue the new ballot paper for the 2004 European elections in a portrait format, but other aspects of its design remain to be fixed. Of course, DCA also consults other government departments with responsibilities relevant to the conduct of elections, and both DCA and the Commission consult stakeholders in the wider community.

How other countries manage government forms

B.27 Concern about the apparent escalation of forms and 'red tape' is not a phenomenon confined to the UK. Several countries have taken steps designed to reduce the burden which regulations and forms may impose on citizens and businesses. In the USA the 1980 Paperwork Reduction Act (re-authorized in 1986 and 1995) requires most departments and agencies to submit forms which they propose to issue to the Office of Management and Budget (OMB, part of the Executive Office of the President). OMB has to certify that each form (collecting information from 10 or more people) complies with the objectives of the Act in reducing the volume of government paperwork over time; in containing only elements which are strictly required by law; and in not imposing undue burdens upon citizens or businesses.

B.28 The Paperwork Reduction Act has lead to Americans placing great emphasis on limiting the number of pages of a form. The major US government forms are hence typically very short on first look, and are often printed in small font. For example, the core income tax declaration, which citizens must file annually with the Internal Revenue Service, is two pages long, although there are in fact many different (but short) supplementary pages. A long tradition of first making federal forms available for printing via compact discs in public libraries, and latterly of forms being available to download from the Web, means that most US forms are also printed solely in black and white. There are substantial numbers of forms not covered by OMB regulation, however, and these can often be lengthy. The main form for naturalization as a US citizen is 75 pages long, for instance.

B.29 The American style of minimizing the page lengths of forms is often followed also in Canadian and Australian government. The Australian government places considerable emphasis upon 'useability' and consultants are sometimes involved in the design of new forms. The Canadian government has some examples of good practice. For instance, its passport application form includes explanatory notes and guidance in tear-off strips attached to the form itself, with each note next to the question it refers to - rather than providing guidance in a separate leaflet, where users have to locate the relevant questions and passages twice. Both Canadian and Australian forms tend to look 'punchier' than most British forms, without long initial preambles for instance. By contrast, New Zealand forms are closer in style to the British model.

B.30 In France a programme of 'administrative simplification' has been underway since 1998, spearheaded by a dedicated agency, the Delegation for Administrative Simplification (DUSA, previously called a Commission), which reports to the Prime Minister. DUSA oversees a process by which all central agencies audit the usability of their forms and publish the results, and encourages the creation of e-forms and downloadable forms. The agency negotiates with and advises ministries and agencies issuing forms to try to secure reductions in their length or onerousness. France has a long tradition of multiple supporting documents being required with government forms, often as 'certified copies'. DUSA focuses especially on reducing such demands and on ensuring that citizens do not have to re-supply agencies with information already provided. DUSA also formulates important programmes of legal simplification through two legislative bills which scale back entire blocs of administrative procedures.

B.31 Seen in comparative perspective, British government forms as a whole stand out as being much more designed, colourful and spaciously laid out than overseas examples. They often use larger fonts for text and more graphic devices designed to make forms' layout accessible to citizens. Yet they often also span across more pages, include large amounts of preamble text and declarations text next to signatures, and have bulky guidance notes or completion packs - aspects which might seem off-putting for users on a first look.

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Progress in making e-services accessible to all - encouraging use by older people ....HC 428
Developing effective services for Older People........HC 518
Improving service delivery:

- The Veterans Agency ....HC 522
- The Forensic Science Service ....HC 523
- The Food Standards Agency ....HC 524
- The role of Executive Agencies ....HC 525

Getting the evidence: Using research in policy making ....HC 586-I
Getting the evidence: Using research in policy making An international review on Governments' research procurement strategies.......................................HC 586-II
Purchasing and Managing Software Licences ....HC 579
Difficult Forms: How government agencies interact with citizens...HC 1145

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Through-Life Management ....HC 698
Ministry of Defence: Compensation claims ....HC 957

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Difficult Forms: How government agencies interact with citizens

A report by the Comptroller and Auditor General

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