

[We can't be beaten by Americans: we should go much further than this](#) [1]

Written by [Tim Worstall](#) [2] | Saturday 11 August 2012

The White House has [just announced](#) [3]:

To fulfill its functions, the federal government asks people to fill out a lot of forms. To get permits and licenses, to pay taxes, and to qualify for benefits and grants, forms are often required. Too often, however, those forms are too confusing and complicated, especially for individuals and small businesses. [Today we are doing something about that problem](#) [4].

From now on, agencies will be asked to test complex or lengthy forms in advance, by seeing if people can actually understand them. Advance testing can take many forms. Agencies might use focus groups. They might use web-based experiments. They might try in-person observations of how users understand the forms. From those tests, agencies will be better able to identify the likely burdens on members of the public and to find ways to increase simplification and ease of comprehension.

We cannot let ourselves be beaten by such a group of rebellious colonials of course.

There's also a story rolling around my memory of Maggie, when in Number 10, insisting that she should try out the draft census form. As a result of which at least one question was dropped for being far too invasive. I would suggest that we build upon that precedent in order to beat those Yanks.

Any and every form that is issued for us *hoi polloi* to fill out must first be tried out on the relevant Minister (with local councils, the mayor, lead councillor, whatever, and so on through the ranks). No help from officials, no phoning a friend. Just the form and the proposed guidance notes in a locked office. Any form which cannot be so completed must and will be rejected as an imposition upon the populace.

The procedure will not happen once. It is something that will be repeated by every minister upon taking office: yea even if they're just moving around in the same department. Quite apart from anything else I cannot think of a better way for a politician to find out what it is that government actually does.

Now it is true, given the intellectual capacity of all many some most (choose your favourite here) who achieve high office, that we'll end up with a series of forms which can only be completed in thick crayon in words of one syllable. But that's fine: it all takes us a step closer to the paradise that Sir John Cowperthwaite enforced in Hong Kong. He refused to allow anyone to collect economics statistics like GDP on the grounds that if they were known then some damn fool would only have the impertinence to try and do something about them.

For here is the real point about all of this. It is right and proper that there is open government for we most assuredly should know what it is that they are doing to us with our money. But they should know little to nothing about us and what we do for we're free people in a free land and therefore it's absolutely none of their damn business how we decide to spend our lives.

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[1] <http://www.adamsmith.org/blog/regulation-industry/we-cant-be-beaten-by-americans-we-should-go-much-further-than-this>

[2] <http://www.adamsmith.org/taxonomy/term/5833>

[3] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/blog/2012/08/09/making-forms-simpler>

[4] <http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/omb/inforeg/memos/testing-and-simplifying-federal-forms.pdf>

[5] http://disqus.com/?ref_noscript

[6] <http://disqus.com>