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The
Electoral
Commission



Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

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Translations and other formats

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Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

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1 Introduction

The Electoral Commission is an independent body set up by the UK Parliament under the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA). Our aim is integrity and public confidence in the UK's democratic process by the regulation of party and election finance and setting standards for well-run elections. Our *Corporate plan 2008–09 to 2012–13* sets our strategic direction over the five years from April 2008. The aims and objectives of the plan are underpinned by two key priorities – demonstrating and enhancing our effectiveness as the regulator of party and election finance and leading the drive for increasingly high standards of electoral administration, including electoral registration. Our objectives for the period 2008–09 to 2012–13 are:

- integrity and transparency of party and election finance
- complete and accurate electoral registers supported by a well-run electoral registration process
- well-run elections and referendums which produce results that are accepted
- public understanding of the way our democracy works
- fair boundary arrangements for elections

Performance standards for electoral administration

1.1 Section 67 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 (EAA) inserted new Sections 9A, 9B and 9C into PERA. These sections allow the Commission to set and monitor performance standards for electoral services and to collect information on the cost of electoral services from Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and Referendum Counting Officers in Great Britain. The powers do not apply in Northern Ireland or to local government elections in Scotland. Under these provisions, the Commission may:

- determine and publish standards of performance for relevant electoral officers in Great Britain (Electoral Registration Officers, Returning Officers and Regional Counting Officers)
- direct relevant officers to provide the Commission with reports regarding their performance against the published standards
- publish its assessment of the level of performance by relevant officers against the published standards

1.2 Since these new powers came into force in September 2006, the Commission has consulted widely with electoral administrators and other stakeholders to develop the final performance standards presented in this document.

1.3 The following pages contain the seven performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain and the Commission's vision for quality electoral services, to which the standards refer. Additional guidance for reporting against the standards for Returning Officers has also been published and is available from the Commission's website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk

2 Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

Planning and organisation

Performance standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Planning and organisation		Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure that Returning Officers have sufficient skills and knowledge to carry out their statutory duties.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer is aware of the personal nature of the duties and responsibilities of the role but does not meet the criteria outlined below.		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> is aware of the contents of the Electoral Commission’s guidance materials for the administration of elections and has a working knowledge of electoral legislation is able to identify and oversee the necessary actions to rectify any errors in procedure commands the required staff and resources required for a well-run election 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Appointment agreement including an acknowledgement of role, duties and responsibilities Election team management structure showing the roles of the Returning Officer and their election team members

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • supports the staff administering the election and provides appropriate oversight of their work • oversees the planning, project management and risk analysis elements of the election and provides direction and receives regular feedback on activities and monitors progress • understands the main processes and procedures at the election in order to review the planning, question any aspect of and quality assure the whole election process • ensures that election accounts are completed in a timely manner • has a working relationship with the Electoral Registration Officer 		
Above the performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • can demonstrate a strong knowledge of electoral law and both existing and developing practice • undertakes continuous personal development in regards to election management 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Record of training and briefing events attended • Continuing Professional Development programme/training plan

Performance standard 2: Planning processes in place for an election		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Planning and organisation		Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have developed robust planning processes for an election.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure that a written plan is in place and relies on unstructured management controls such as oral or written updates and past experience only. Objectives, risks, any external contracts and available resources are not formally documented.		
Performance standard	<p>2. The Returning Officer ensures that formal, written plans are in place for an election. These should include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • clearly defined objectives and success measures • risks – identification and mitigation • recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed • business continuity arrangements • consideration of physical and communication accessibility, including a plan of the layout of the count premises • an outline of the roles and duties of all the staff present at the count <p>As well as a written plan, the Returning Officer ensures that contracts are in place for all outsourced functions or supplies and that contingency plans are prepared in case of failure of any of these contracts.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Plan(s) • Risk register • Business continuity arrangements • Plan of layout of the count premises • Contracts and contingency plans

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • a thorough evaluation of all processes outlined in the plan is carried out • feedback is sought from all appropriate stakeholders including candidates, agents and staff (both temporary and permanent) • the plan is amended, where necessary, for future elections as a result of the evaluation findings 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation plan • Documented feedback

Performance standard 3: Training		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Planning and organisation		Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have provided appropriate training for all staff used to deliver an election.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure provision of any training to either permanent or temporary staff other than a basic induction.		
	2. The Returning Officer ensures provision of basic training for permanent members of staff only, to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of training activities
Performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer ensures provision of training to both permanent and temporary staff on an ongoing basis, to ensure awareness and understanding of legislative requirements.</p> <p>The Returning Officer has ensured that training for polling station and count staff includes information and a briefing on access issues and procedures, and disability awareness training as appropriate.</p> <p>The Returning Officer ensures that evaluation of individual training activities is carried out.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Schedule of training activities Training materials Evaluation of the individual training activities

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard	4. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that a written training plan for both permanent and temporary staff is in place, and evaluation of the effectiveness of the plan, including identification of training needs for the future, is carried out on a regular basis.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Training plan • Evaluation plan

Integrity

Performance standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of an election		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Integrity		Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have a process in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate electoral malpractice and any security issues that may arise.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure that there is a system in place to assess risks of electoral malpractice when planning for an election.		
	2. The Returning Officer ensures that there is an informal system in place to assess risks of electoral malpractice but does not document this.		
Performance standard	<p>3. The Returning Officer has ensured that links have been developed with the local police/single point of contact (SPOC) to enable any concerns around electoral malpractice and any public order and safety issues to be referred.</p> <p>The Returning Officer ensures that there is a written plan outlining what steps are to be taken to deal with concerns about electoral malpractice. The plan contains a risk assessment that will identify and note action to take to tackle any concerns about electoral malpractice.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings/discussions/correspondence with local Police/SPOC, political parties, independent candidates and other relevant bodies including the Electoral Registration Officer • Plan • Risk assessment documentation

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
	The Returning Officer ensures that work with political parties and independent candidates is carried out as well as working with other relevant bodies including the Electoral Registration Officer.	
Above the performance standard	4. In addition to the above, the Returning Officer carries out an evaluation of the processes outlined above and implements initiatives to protect those who may be at risk of electoral malpractice.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation document • Documented details of initiatives

Participation

Performance standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Participation		User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers effectively plan and deliver public awareness activity to communicate election information to electors.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer has not ensured implementation of any public awareness activity and only provides statutory information to electors. There are no response mechanisms in place (such as phone, website or email) to ensure that information is correctly and appropriately communicated.		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer ensures that a written public awareness strategy, which covers internal and external communication is in place. The Returning Officer ensures that all outgoing communication provides appropriate contact details to allow interested parties to respond and find out further information. The Returning Officer ensures that there is active engagement with other departments of the local authority.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Written strategy • Examples of outgoing communication • Records of meetings/discussion/correspondence with other departments

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings/discussions/correspondence with external bodies • Record of work undertaken (if determined to be appropriate)
<p>3. In addition to the above, the Returning Officer ensures that external bodies (such as other authorities, other Returning Officers and Electoral Registration Officers, local media and community groups) have been identified and consulted with to determine whether working with partners to pool resources and communication channels with other partners is worthwhile and, where appropriate, this joint work has been undertaken.</p> <p>4. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that an evaluation methodology for all activities undertaken (including those with external partners, the public awareness strategy and different dissemination methods), has been developed.</p> <p>Future work is planned taking account of the outcomes of this evaluation.</p>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation methodology

Performance standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Participation		User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors	
This standard aims to ensure that Returning Officers provide a simple and user friendly way for electors to access information.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer ensures that information is provided in one format and has not taken account of the needs of different audiences (for example, translation or alternative formats).		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer ensures that: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • relevant research (in consultation with appropriate organisations) has been carried out to determine the appropriate languages and formats required to communicate with relevant audiences • they are responsive to changes in the demographics of the electoral area and takes note of research as to whether further formats or languages are necessary • information is produced and disseminated in a number of mediums appropriate to the audience • signage (both internal and external) and information to be provided to all polling stations are in appropriate formats and easily accessible 		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of how the appropriate languages and formats have been decided • Details of what demographic monitoring takes place • Details of dissemination methods • Record of polling station inspector reports on signage

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Above the performance standard	3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures a process is in place for consultation with local organisations (including disability groups) about ways in which election documents can be improved and ensures that an evaluation of the accessibility of information is carried out.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Records of meetings/discussions/ correspondence with those consulted

Performance standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents		Supports vision theme:	
Subject: Participation		User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors	
This standard aims to ensure that Returning Officers effectively communicate election information to candidates and agents.			
Performance against the standard		Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
Not currently meeting the performance standard	1. The Returning Officer does not ensure that candidates and/or election agents are issued with any written guidance on the nomination process or count procedure. Briefing sessions with candidates and/or election agents are not offered.		
Performance standard	2. The Returning Officer ensures briefing sessions for candidates and/or election agents are offered and that all candidates and/or election agents are issued with written guidance on the election process. The Returning Officer ensures that candidates have the opportunity to have their nomination papers informally checked prior to formal submission of their nomination.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Examples of information given to candidates and/or agents • Log of appointments/meetings with candidates
Above the performance standard	3. The Returning Officer, in addition to the above, ensures that an evaluation of the effectiveness of all information provided to candidates and agents and the communication methods used is carried out.		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Details of evaluation of information provided

3 Vision for quality electoral services

<p>In the United Kingdom people have the right to say who governs them. They therefore have a right to vote (or not to vote) in secret, for who they want, in a way that is easy for them, and to have their vote counted. They expect that the core values of public office should be enshrined in electoral services (registration and elections) and should support the modernising and ethical standards agenda in public service.</p>				
	<p>This means electors can expect...</p>	<p>This means candidates and parties can expect...</p>	<p>This means those involved in administration can expect...</p>	<p>This means those involved in Government and the Electoral Commission can expect...</p>
<p>Integrity – a secure process for registration and voting</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To know information about them is accurate and to be clear how it is used Their vote is confidential and they can make it free from pressure To know their vote is counted 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Processes which are transparent and checked Accurate results 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Support from bodies such as the Electoral Commission, government departments and local authorities Independence from political parties Police, courts and prosecutors who are conversant with electoral law 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The results of any election are accepted by the public and candidates The voter has confidence in both the process and the results
<p>User focus – an easy and accessible process for candidates and electors</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> A voting process that is easy to understand To have a choice of ways to vote To be able to vote in a way that suits their lifestyle and needs Information and advice which is accurate, prompt and easy to understand 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To know how to stand for election Consistency of approach and realistic timescales Clarity and impartiality in the process A clear process of redress 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> External suppliers who deliver what is expected of them 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electoral staff are proactive in encouraging registration and voting Participating in democracy seen as part of active citizenship
<p>Professionalism – a clear and consistent approach to delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> To know if they are eligible to register and vote To know how and when to register and what to do if they move To know where to get information and advice To know who and what they are voting for Young people to be educated about registering and voting 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Those involved in administration of the process to be fully conversant with electoral law Consistent application of electoral law and processes Clear and timely information, advice and guidance An appropriate balance between speed and quality in the process 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The legislative framework and associated rules are clear and are consistently applied There is focused and timely training and guidance Legislation is introduced in a timely manner The electoral service is recognised as a customer facing service 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> The service operates in line with the legislation There is consistency in service delivery
<p>Value for money – efficient and effective service delivery</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Effective use of public money 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Electoral administrators to have the right skills Timely quality checks to be carried out 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Adequate resources are available to deliver what is expected Local context, issues and priorities are recognised Appropriately skilled staff are available in areas such as project management, contract management, and ICT. 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Maximum registration of eligible citizens Maximum participation in elections Appropriate use of public money

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see inside back cover for details.

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Democracy matters