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The  
Electoral  
Commission



# Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

Presented to Parliament pursuant to section 9A of the Political Parties,  
Elections and Referendums Act 2000

## **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](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk)

## 2 Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain

### Planning and organisation

<b>Performance standard 1:</b> Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer		<b>Supports vision theme:</b>	
<b>Subject:</b> Planning and organisation		<b>Professionalism</b> – 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.			
<b>Performance against the standard</b>		<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Evidence to support assessment</b>
<b>Not currently meeting the performance standard</b>	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.		
<b>Performance standard</b>	2. The Returning Officer: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>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</li> <li>is able to identify and oversee the necessary actions to rectify any errors in procedure</li> <li>commands the required staff and resources required for a well-run election</li> </ul>		<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Appointment agreement including an acknowledgement of role, duties and responsibilities</li> <li>Election team management structure showing the roles of the Returning Officer and their election team members</li> </ul>

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

<b>Performance standard 2:</b> Planning processes in place for an election		<b>Supports vision theme:</b>	
<b>Subject:</b> Planning and organisation		<b>Professionalism</b> – a clear and consistent approach to delivery	
This standard aims to ensure Returning Officers have developed robust planning processes for an election.			
<b>Performance against the standard</b>		<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Evidence to support assessment</b>
<b>Not currently meeting the performance standard</b>	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.		
<b>Performance standard</b>	<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"> <li>• clearly defined objectives and success measures</li> <li>• risks – identification and mitigation</li> <li>• recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed</li> <li>• business continuity arrangements</li> <li>• consideration of physical and communication accessibility, including a plan of the layout of the count premises</li> <li>• an outline of the roles and duties of all the staff present at the count</li> </ul> <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"> <li>• Plan(s)</li> <li>• Risk register</li> <li>• Business continuity arrangements</li> <li>• Plan of layout of the count premises</li> <li>• Contracts and contingency plans</li> </ul>

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

<b>Performance standard 3: Training</b>		<b>Supports vision theme:</b>	
<b>Subject:</b> Planning and organisation		<b>Professionalism</b> – 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.			
<b>Performance against the standard</b>		<b>Assessment</b>	<b>Evidence to support assessment</b>
<b>Not currently meeting the performance standard</b>	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"> <li>Schedule of training activities</li> </ul>
<b>Performance standard</b>	<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"> <li>Schedule of training activities</li> <li>Training materials</li> <li>Evaluation of the individual training activities</li> </ul>

Performance against the standard	Assessment	Evidence to support assessment
<b>Above the performance standard</b>	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"> <li>• Training plan</li> <li>• Evaluation plan</li> </ul>



















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Northern Ireland and the English regions,  
see inside back cover for details.

We are an independent body set up by  
the UK Parliament. Our aim is integrity and  
public confidence in the democratic process.  
We regulate party and election finance and  
set standards for well-run elections.

Democracy matters