



Report on performance standards for (Acting) Returning Officers in Great Britain

UK general election 2010

December 2010

Translations and other formats

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Summary

On 6 May 2010 the UK general election was held across the UK. We want people who are entitled to vote to be able to vote, knowing that voting is as straightforward, accessible and secure as possible. We also want them to receive a consistently high-quality service wherever they live. Across most of Great Britain the election was well run and electors were able to cast their vote. However, in a small number of areas there was a build-up of queues during the day and towards the close of poll.

Consequently some electors were not able to vote and some were allowed to do so after the polls had closed at 10pm. It is the responsibility of (Acting) Returning Officers ((A)ROs) across Great Britain,¹ to ensure that they provide a high-quality service and that such issues do not occur.

Our role is to monitor the performance of (A)ROs in Great Britain through our performance standards framework, to highlight where elections are well run and to challenge (A)ROs where the service received by electors is below standard. We also provide support and guidance to enable improvements in electoral practice.

This report is our second assessment of (A)ROs' performance against a series of standards published in March 2009. Our first report was published in January 2010² and covered the performance of Returning Officers at the European Parliamentary elections held in June 2009.

The performance standards framework

There are seven performance standards for (A)ROs in Great Britain. The standards are grouped into three subject areas representing the most important areas that (A)ROs should focus on to ensure elections are well run.

¹ The performance standards provisions introduced by the Electoral Administration Act 2006 do not apply in Northern Ireland. The Chief Electoral Officer for Northern Ireland is the Returning Officer for all elections in Northern Ireland, including UK general elections. The Chief Electoral Officer is appointed by the Secretary of State for Northern Ireland, and is supported by permanent staff in the Electoral Office for Northern Ireland.

² Electoral Commission, *Report on performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain: European Parliamentary elections 2009* (January 2010) available at http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/83887/Analysis-of-RO-Performance-2009-final.pdf.

Table 1: Performance standards for (Acting) Returning Officers in Great Britain

Subject area	Performance standards
Planning and organisation	Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer
	Standard 2: Planning processes in place for an election
	Standard 3: Training
Integrity	Standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of an election
Participation	Standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity
	Standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors
	Standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents

(A)ROs in Great Britain were directed to report on their performance against each of the seven standards, after the UK general election. The analysis in this report is based on a complete set of information submitted by all 372 (A)ROs in Great Britain. We set clear guidelines against which (A)ROs' performance has been assessed. We have subjected these assessments to a significant level of checking to ensure that they are consistent and accurate.

Performance against the standards

Overall, the second assessment against the standards has shown a further improvement in performance by (A)ROs in Great Britain.

- 96% (356) of (A)ROs met or exceeded all three of the standards relating to Planning and organisation (Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer, Standard 2: Planning and Standard 3: Training). This represents an improvement from 91% (346) last year. However, one (A)RO failed all three standards in this area.
- 98% (365) either met or exceeded the first standard relating to Skills and knowledge of the (A)RO. This was the same percentage as the previous year. However, seven (A)ROs were below this standard including four (A)ROs in constituencies that had queues outside polling stations (Liverpool, Milton Keynes, Newcastle upon Tyne and Newcastle-under-Lyme), and three others (Barking and Dagenham, Bristol, North East Lincolnshire).
- 94% (351) of (A)ROs met or exceeded Standard 4: Integrity. This was an improvement from 81% (307) last year. Twenty-one (A)ROs said that they did not meet this standard this year, compared to 71 in 2009.

- 90% (333) of (A)ROs met or exceeded all three standards in Participation. However, 39 (A)ROs were below at least one of the three standards. In 2009, just over 75% (285) of officers met or exceeded all the standards in this subject area.
- The main reason for performing below the standard in Participation was lack of a formal plan and a reported lack of resources. Many relied on our high profile public awareness campaigns and did not carry out additional local work to encourage participation in target audiences. This was also an area identified as needing improvement in 2009.

We have been encouraged both by the overall level of performance against the standards, and by the willingness of (A)ROs and their teams to use the performance standards framework as a basis for continued improvement. However, there are still areas requiring immediate improvement and we intend to address these by working closely with (A)ROs to ensure that plans are put in place. We will challenge them should they continue to fail to do so.

Our first analysis of the performance of (A)ROs after the 2009 European Parliamentary elections identified a lack of written documented plans for election processes. Our discussions with (A)ROs, Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) and electoral services managers over the last year suggest that (A)ROs adopt a more structured approach to election planning than EROs apply to registration planning. This may be due to the high profile and public nature of the role. Although it is encouraging that (A)ROs ensure they have the correct procedures and documentation in place to carry out a successful election, a similar approach should also be carried out for registration processes. There remain weaknesses in planning and delivering rolling registration, and the annual canvass, which is generally carried out in a process-rich environment, marked by a lack of formal project planning and documentation.

We published an Interim report shortly after the UK general election identifying the factors that contributed to the build-up of queues outside polling stations in some areas in England.³ Our report identified the key contributory factors as incorrect planning assumptions for dealing with a higher than expected turnout and a combination of elections on the same day. We have downgraded the assessment of performance against Standard 2: Planning for five of the (A)ROs responsible for the areas that experienced problems at the close of poll, and in some cases we have also downgraded their assessments for Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer, and Standard 3: Training.

³ The Electoral Commission, *2010 UK Parliamentary general election – Interim report: review of problems at polling stations at close of poll on 6 May 2010* (May 2010), available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/99091/Interim-Report-Polling-Station-Queues-complete.pdf.

With the possibility of combined electoral events across nearly all of the UK in 2011, we will be working with all Returning Officers and Counting Officers to ensure that the difficulties that occurred in a small number of areas this year are not repeated in the future.

We will be providing clear instructions to all Counting Officers outlining the steps we expect them to take to ensure that all plans and processes in place for any referendums are done well in advance of the event. These instructions will replace the draft performance standards framework for Counting Officers that were published for consultation in May 2010. Rather than assessing the performance of Counting Officers after the referendums have been held, their performance will be actively monitored in the planning stages and through to delivery of the events themselves. We will also seek to progress an agenda for legislative change, in particular to apply flexibility in voting procedures towards the close of poll.

Following the 2009 European Parliamentary elections we published guidance focusing specifically on work relating to integrity, participation and planning, and templates to help (A)ROs meet minimum standards. In addition, we met with (A)ROs to discuss actions they could take to improve their performance. We explained how our templates could be used as a starting point, and then developed to suit local circumstances. We held seminars and gave briefings at regional meetings with (A)ROs and electoral administrators. This year we will continue to promote the benefits of formal planning to encourage improvement in performance. We will use and update the performance standards framework to ensure it addresses the lessons learned from 2010 and 2011. We look forward to working with (A)ROs to support continued improvements in performance.

Information about the performance of individual (A)ROs is available on our website, where anyone can review performance against the standards in an accessible chart-based format. This tool also enables comparison of performance with (A)ROs for other local authorities, and with past performance. This information can be found on our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards.

1 Introduction

The role of the (Acting) Returning Officer

1.1 Central to the successful delivery of any election are the many individuals who are responsible for planning and managing the administration of postal voting, polling stations and count centres. For the UK general election this included (Acting) Returning Officers ((A)ROs), Electoral Registration Officers and electoral administrators.

1.2 For each constituency the delivery of the elections was the responsibility of the (A)RO. Their key functions included the conduct of the poll, including the issue and receipt of postal votes, the allocation and staffing of polling stations and the verification of ballot papers and the count. Support for the (A)RO comes from staff across the whole council and not just the electoral services teams.

1.3 The Representation of the People Act 1983 sets out the responsibilities of (A)ROs in conducting the election. The provisions serve to emphasise the independence of (A)ROs at UK general elections from their local authority. They are directly accountable to the courts as an independent statutory office holder.

Performance standards for Returning Officers

1.4 This is the second report into our assessment of Returning Officers' (ROs') performance. In July 2009, we published the initial findings of our first assessment against the performance standards for Local Returning Officers (LROs) in Great Britain following the European Parliamentary elections held in June 2009.⁴ For the purposes of this report, '(A)RO' will refer to the duties normally undertaken by the Acting Returning Officer in England and Wales, and by the Returning Officer in Scotland. We published a more comprehensive report in October 2009.⁵ An introduction and background to performance standards can also be found on our website.⁶

1.5 Acting on our first report of ROs' performance, we published guidance (*Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a UK general election*),

⁴ The Electoral Commission, *Performance standards for Returning Officers in Great Britain* (March 2009), available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/72709/131-Performance-standards-for-ROs-final-20090226.pdf.

⁵ Available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0007/83887/Analysis-of-RO-Performance-2009-final.pdf.

⁶ Available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/__data/assets/pdf_file/0019/100837/Background.pdf.

to provide further advice and clarification in areas where we had identified it was needed. In addition, in October 2009, we published templates developed to support (A)ROs in meeting those performance standards that require specific plans.

1.6 Information about the performance of individual (A)ROs is also available on our website, where anyone can review performance against the standards in an accessible chart-based format. This tool also enables comparison of performance with officers for other local authorities, and allows comparison with past performance. This information can be found on our website at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/performance-standards/results_and_analysis/assessment.

Request for information from (Acting) Returning Officers

1.7 On 16 March 2010 we directed (A)ROs⁷ to report on their performance against the seven performance standards. The direction was to all (A)ROs at the UK general election in Great Britain. (A)ROs who were also ROs at local government elections in England were asked to complete the performance return once only and, where appropriate, make a distinction between roles using the free-text box.

Verification of performance assessments

1.8 After receiving performance returns from (A)ROs, we undertook a sample-based verification exercise to ensure that the information that we received was accurate and could be backed up by evidence. During the verification process we paid particular attention to those local authorities whose performance improved from being below any of the standards following the European Parliamentary elections in 2009 and examined their evidence against the criteria in our guidance. We also spoke to the (A)ROs identified in our Interim report on the UK general election and scrutinised the evidence of their planning processes.

1.9 We met with over 100 (A)ROs across Great Britain to discuss performance against the standards and scrutinise the evidence provided. If we decided that the evidence was not sufficient to support the assessment, we either asked for further evidence to be submitted or arranged a visit to discuss the assessment further.

1.10 In a third (33) of cases, we asked (A)ROs to reconsider their assessments as they did not meet the criteria in our guidance to meet the standards and were

⁷ www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/87477/EC07-Direction-to-ROs.pdf.

assessed either too high or too low. Of these, 23 (A)ROs agreed to amend their initial assessment and 11 were changed by us. The (A)RO for Lambeth failed to provide any evidence to support the assessment for Standard 2: Planning, Standard 3: Training, and Standard 4: Integrity, despite repeated requests to do so, and was downgraded accordingly.

1.11 We also decided to reassess four of the 11 (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report into the UK general election, downgrading them for Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the RO. It should be noted that initially all of these (A)ROs disagreed with our assessment of them for this standard. However, we felt that on the evidence available they did not meet the criteria in our guidance to meet the standards. They were Liverpool, Milton Keynes, Newcastle-under-Lyme, and Newcastle upon Tyne.

1.12 We also downgraded the assessments of five (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report for Standard 2: Planning. They were Birmingham, Islington, Liverpool, Manchester and Milton Keynes. All were moved from above the standard to meeting the standard.

Using performance information

1.13 The information that we have collected has been analysed to identify where performance could be improved, and how we can support (A)ROs. In order to use the information that we have collected effectively, we intend to undertake more detailed follow-up analysis on specific issues as we continue the development of our performance standards framework.

1.14 We analysed the information that we have collected to identify where performance can be improved, and how we can support (A)ROs in doing this. The findings from the analysis carried out last year enabled us to publish revised guidance and a series of planning and evaluation tools to assist officers in meeting the standards, as this was a weakness previously identified. We are using the findings to continue our promotion of performance improvement, especially targeting those officers who have reported lower levels of performance since last year.

1.15 However, some of the issues arising from the review into polling stations have shown the limitations of the framework and of the practice of verifying evidence after the election has taken place. In the months ahead, there will be a referendum in Wales in spring 2011, elections on 5 May 2011 to the Scottish Parliament, National Assembly for Wales and Northern Ireland Assembly, along with local government elections and mayoral elections in areas of England. A UK-wide referendum on the voting system for the UK parliament is additionally proposed for the same day.

1.16 We will be providing clear instructions to all Counting Officers, outlining the steps we expect them to take to ensure that all plans and processes put in place for any referendums are done well in advance of the event. These instructions will replace the draft performance standards framework for Counting Officers

that were published for consultation in May 2010. Rather than assessing the performance of Counting Officers after a referendum is held, their performance will be actively monitored in the planning stages and through to delivery of the events themselves.

1.17 We will work with the Deputy and Regional Counting Officers to monitor delivery at a local level to ensure that the Chief Counting Officer's instructions are being correctly interpreted and followed. We will report on each electoral event in 2011 using public opinion research, an analysis of elections and referendums data, and feedback from electoral administrators and campaigners.

1.18 Following the referendum, we will continue with the performance improvement work we have been doing with local authorities, which will focus specifically on the recommendations outlined in the Interim report:

- (A)ROs for any future elections in the UK should – as a matter of urgency – review their planning assumptions for the provision and staffing of polling stations, reflecting on the problems at the May 2010 elections.
- Local authorities in Great Britain have taken steps to begin the process of conducting reviews of polling districts and polling places, reflecting on the problems identified at the May 2010 elections.
- We will review our guidance for (A)ROs to set out in more detail key factors they should consider in planning for the provision and staffing of polling stations. We will also consider whether, although we have no formal powers to require (A)ROs to cooperate, we can put informal monitoring arrangements in place to ensure that these recommended actions are taken.
- We will use the results of our Interim report, and this performance standards assessment, to identify particular areas where we will need to follow up and challenge poor performance.
- We will use and update the performance standards framework to ensure it addresses the lessons learned from 2010 and 2011.

2 Performance against the standards

2.1 The (Acting) Returning Officer ((A)RO) appointed for each constituency is responsible for the administration of UK general elections in accordance with legislation. For the May 2010 UK general election a total of 372 (A)ROs were responsible for the 632 constituencies in Great Britain.

2.2 In England and Wales, practical responsibility for the administration of the election lies with an (A)RO for each constituency, who is the person appointed as the Electoral Registration Officer (ERO) for the relevant local authority area. In most instances this is the Chief Executive of the local authority, but may be another senior officer. Local authorities in England are classified according to a number of different authority types (unlike in Scotland and Wales where all councils are the same type). These are metropolitan districts, unitary authorities, London boroughs and district councils. The detailed planning and administration of the election is usually carried out by members of the local authority's permanent staff.

2.3 In Scotland, the (A)RO for UK general elections is the same person appointed by the local authority as the Returning Officer (RO) for local government elections. As in England, in most instances this is the Chief Executive of the local authority, and again the detailed planning and administration of the election is usually carried out by members of the local authority's permanent staff.

2.4 For the purposes of this report, '(A)RO' will refer to the duties normally undertaken by the Acting Returning Officer in England and Wales, and by the Returning Officer in Scotland.

2.5 There is some variation in the performance of (A)ROs across Great Britain and also across the different types of authorities in England. These variations and other relevant findings are outlined in more detail below. During the coming year, we will ensure that we learn from (A)ROs in both higher and lower performing authorities and understand what underpins their levels of performance.

2.6 The performance standards are grouped into three subject areas representing the most important areas that (A)ROs should focus on to maintain a well-run election.

Table 2: Performance standards for (Acting) Returning Officers in Great Britain

Subject area	Performance standards
Planning and organisation	Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer
	Standard 2: Planning processes in place for an election
	Standard 3: Training
Integrity	Standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of an election
Participation	Standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity
	Standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors
	Standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents

2.7 (A)ROs were asked to report on whether they were below, at, or above the performance standards. For Standards 3 and 4 there are two levels of performance below the standard, and for Standard 5, two levels of performance above the standard.

2.8 For Standards 3 and 4, the lower level below the standard indicates that the officer does not carry out any activities towards meeting the standard, while the second level indicates that some of the activities we would expect are being carried out, but not sufficiently to meet the standard. For the purpose of the analysis which follows, we have used only the three categories of performance and have not illustrated findings relating to the levels within each category.

2.9 As part of our verification process to assess the reliability and accuracy of these assessments, we met with a sample of 10% of (A)ROs in each region across Great Britain. Of those that we visited, the majority of (A)ROs held the position of Chief Executive of the local authority. In addition to this, we spoke with all (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report into the UK general election.

Summary of performance across Great Britain

2.10 The overall performance of (A)ROs in Great Britain is illustrated in Chart 1, which shows the proportion of officers who meet each standard. The key findings and analysis are outlined in more detail in this section. Table 3 shows

the percentage change in performance from our first assessment of ROs' performance published in 2009.⁸

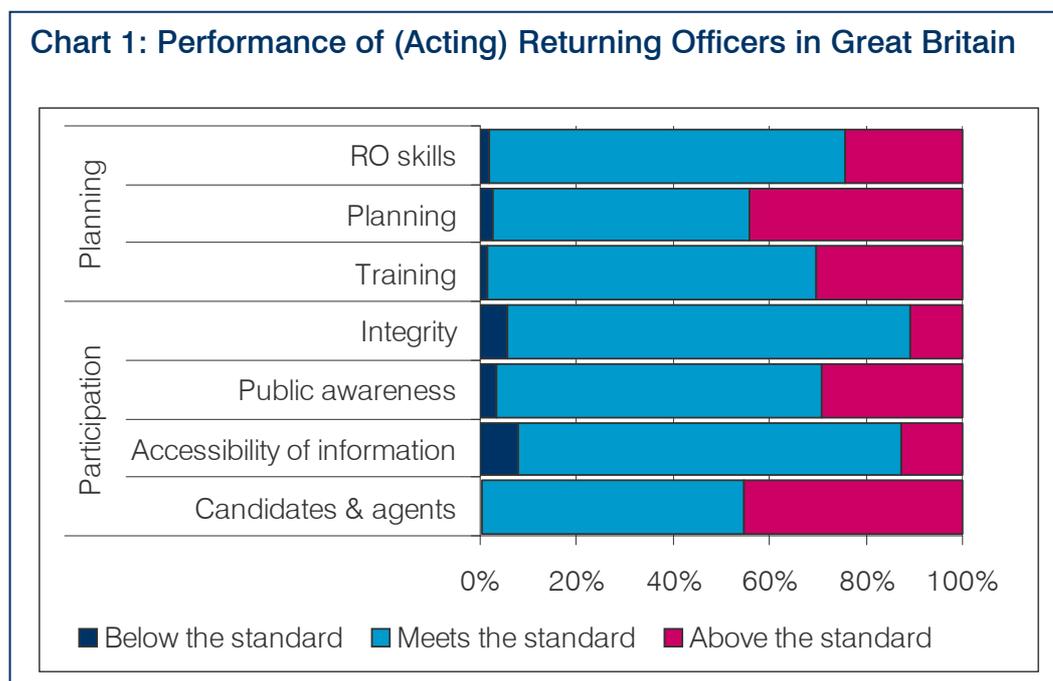


Table 3: Percentage change in performance from 2009 to 2010

		Not currently meeting the standard	Meets the standard	Above the standard
Planning	Standard 1: Skills and knowledge	-1.3%	-3.9%	5.1%
	Standard 2: Planning	-2.6%	-12.1%	14.7%
	Standard 3: Training	-0.3%	-11.1%	11.1%
Integrity	Standard 4: Integrity	-13.2%	8.5%	4.7%
Participation	Standard 5: Public awareness	-8.7%	-3.4%	12.1%
	Standard 6: Accessibility	-10.7%	5.2%	5.2%
	Standard 7: Candidates and agents	-1.1%	-16.1%	16.9%

2.11 Table 3 shows that overall performance has improved across all subject areas, and across all standards, evident by the decrease in the number of (A)ROs below all the standards and the increase in officers above the standard. Further analysis has identified these key findings:

⁸ A negative number in Table 2 indicates a reduction in the amount of ROs at that level. In the cases of the figures below and meeting the standard, a negative percentage represents an improvement. The figures may not add up exactly due to rounding.

- Eighty-four percent (311) of (A)ROs met all the standards, an improvement from 65% last year (247). Half of the 61 (A)ROs who failed one or more standards this year, also failed one or more standards last year.
- Only two (A)ROs in Wales were below any of the standards (Planning and Public awareness). There were no (A)ROs in Scotland below any of the standards.
- Twenty (A)ROs failed at least one of the standards in the Planning and organisation subject area with one (A)ROs failing all three.
- Seven (A)ROs were below Standard 1: Skills and knowledge, slightly lower than last year (10).
- There were also differences across England, Scotland and Wales with a higher percentage of (A)ROs in Scotland being above Standard 2: Planning (58% – 18 (A)ROs) compared to England (44% – 139 (A)ROs) and Wales (32% – 7 (A)ROs). Our verification found that (A)ROs in Scotland are making much greater and better use of planning and risk management tools than they have in previous years.
- Twenty-one (A)ROs were below Standard 4: Integrity. The main reason given was due to the lack of a written plan to tackle instances of electoral malpractice.
- Ninety per cent (333) of (A)ROs met all standards in the participation subject area. Eleven (A)ROs were below Standard 5: Public awareness and did not have plans in place for public awareness activities, an area that was also highlighted in both the previous ERO and RO performance standards analysis. Six of these officers failed the same standard last year.
- The poorest performing area was Standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors, with 31 (A)ROs below the standard, although this was an improvement from 69 last year. Of these, 19 also failed this standard in 2009.

Planning and organisation

2.12 The current performance standards focus on the processes the (A)RO has in place and not the detail within the plans or the outcome of the planning process. For this reason, those (A)ROs who were downgraded for having poor planning assumptions, which resulted in queues forming at the close of poll, had sufficient plans to meet Standard 2: Planning, and were therefore not found to be below the standard. This is an area we will work to rectify when the standards are changed.

2.13 Planning and organisation is an area that we have previously identified as requiring improvement in performance standards reports for both EROs and

ROs. Our previous reports have cited a large number of officers performing below a number of the standards requiring a written plan, most notably public awareness activities and integrity issues. We have also developed further guidance and planning templates to make the process less burdensome for officers. The current performance standards assess whether an (A)RO meets the relevant criteria set out in our guidance but do not, however, make a judgement on the effectiveness of the processes used.

2.14 Running an election is a complex logistical operation with statutory obligations, involving considerable financial and physical resources and delivered against tight and inflexible timescales. It is therefore essential that (A)ROs have formal, written plans in place with clearly defined objectives and success measures. These plans should also be well informed and effective, allowing progress to be monitored, and identifying risks and corresponding mitigating actions.

2.15 There were a total of 88 (A)ROs across Great Britain who had not previously had experience of running a UK general election. Many of them have, however, been ROs since 2005 running local government, European Parliamentary, Scottish Parliamentary, Welsh Assembly and London Assembly elections. We met with all of these officers in the months prior to the election to ensure they were adequately prepared for the election. In September 2009 we published guidance for (A)ROs to help planning for the UK general election.⁹

2.16 There are three standards (Skills and knowledge of the RO, Planning and Training) in the Planning and organisation subject area, of which Standards 2 and 3 require a written plan to meet the standard :

- The majority of (A)ROs met or exceed all three standards in this subject area (356), with seven officers below Standard 1, eight below Standard 2, and six below Standard 3.
- One (A)RO was below all three standards in this area (Bristol).
- Just over three-quarters of officers (275) met Standard 1: Skills and knowledge with a quarter (90) saying they were above the standard. Four of the seven below this standard were downgraded following our verification exercise (all of whom were mentioned in our Interim report into polling station queues).
- There was only one (A)RO from Wales and none from Scotland below any of the three standards.

⁹ The Electoral Commission, *Essentials of effective election management: Planning for a UK general election* available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/102836/Full-ARO-manual-March-2010.pdf.

Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer

2.17 The first standard looks at the skills and knowledge of the (A)RO. The (A)RO is, by law, personally responsible for the effective running of the election in their constituency. Although the (A)RO may appoint one or more deputies to carry out all or any of the functions of the office, the personal responsibility for delivering the election cannot be delegated. In order to meet the standard the (A)RO should meet all the requirements as outlined in the standard. This includes:

- having a working knowledge of the legislation to conduct the election
- identifying and overseeing the necessary actions to rectify any errors in procedure
- commanding the necessary staff and resources for a well-run election
- supporting the staff administering the election
- overseeing the planning and risk management of an election
- ensuring that the election accounts are completed in a timely manner

2.18 In order to be above the standard, in addition to the requirements outlined above, the (A)RO should be able to demonstrate that they have a strong knowledge of electoral law and both existing and developing practice, and that they undertake continuous professional development in regards to election management. Specifically, they should be able to provide a record of training and briefing events attended as evidence to support the assessment.

2.19 (A)ROs in Great Britain performed strongly in relation to this standard with all but seven officers at least meeting the standard. The specific cases of the four (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report are discussed in greater detail in chapter 3. The (A)RO for Bristol was reassessed and considered to be below this standard (and the other two in this subject area) following an investigation into the conduct and organisation of the election, which revealed a number of failings. The (A)RO acknowledged that some of the correct legal procedures had not been followed, one of the key requirements specified in our guidance to meet this standard. The (A)RO for Barking and Dagenham is no longer the (A)RO at that authority and the (A)RO for North East Lincolnshire was also below the standard.

2.20 Just under a quarter of (A)ROs in England (79) were above the standard; this was a similar proportion to those in Wales, compared to 19% in Scotland. Proportionally, the highest percentage of officers above the standard was in the South West of England (39% – 13 (A)ROs), although the largest number of officers was in the South East of England (34) which covers a much larger area. There were a number of specific briefings for (A)ROs delivered around the South West, led by the Regional Returning Officer for the European Parliamentary elections, and supported by us. Last year, 13 officers were below the standard. We are pleased to see that all of these officers now either meet, or in one case, perform above the standard.

2.21 Other areas used to show performance above the standard included the (A)RO personally attending pre- and post-election briefing sessions; attendance at SOLACE¹⁰ and Association of Electoral Administrators training courses and being a member of the Association of Council Secretaries and Solicitors, the professional association for managers of corporate governance (to keep up to date with legislative changes).

2.22 Following the European Parliamentary elections in 2009, ROs in London represented the highest proportion above the standard. One of the reasons given was the overall relationship between Chief Executives within London, specifically the London Chief Executive meetings where electoral issues were often discussed. The UK general election in 2010, however, did not have the advantage of the regional structure in place in 2009.

2.23 The majority of (A)ROs across England also held the position of Chief Executive of the local authority and this had the advantage of a regular meeting structure as well as the ability to command council resources more easily for the running of the election. However, we found that (A)ROs who were not Chief Executives were able to be more actively involved in planning and training for the election. Unitary councils had the highest proportion of (A)ROs who have assessed themselves below the standard (almost half of the total officers below the standard across Great Britain).

Standard 2: Planning processes in place for an election

2.24 This standard looks at the process the (A)RO had in place to plan for the UK general election. This standard has three levels and in order to meet the standard the (A)RO should have a written plan for managing the election and ensure that contracts (and contingency arrangements) were in place for all functions that are outsourced. A more detailed analysis of the planning processes of the (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report into polling station queues can be found in chapter 3 of this report. The plan should cover the following areas:

- clearly defined objectives and success measures
- detail of tasks and deadlines
- risks – identification and mitigation
- recruitment of temporary/permanent staff where needed
- business continuity arrangements to cover for loss of election staff, loss of service and loss of venue during the election period
- 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

¹⁰ The Society of Local Authority Chief Executives and Senior Managers.

2.25 In order to be above the performance standard, in addition to having a fully documented plan, the (A)RO should carry out a thorough evaluation of all processes outlined in the plan, seeking feedback from stakeholders and amending the plan, where necessary, for future elections. An evaluation plan and documented feedback should be available as evidence to support the assessment.

2.26 Particular parts of the process that may be considered as part of the evaluation include:

- polling places and polling stations
- contract management
- staffing
- equipment and supplies
- finance
- count arrangements
- the management of postal voting

2.27 Nearly all (A)ROs in Great Britain stated that they met the standard, with just over 44% (164) of all officers stating that they were above the standard, the joint highest proportion across all seven standards. There were eight (A)ROs (seven from England and one from Wales) below this standard.

2.28 During the verification process we were able to meet a number of electoral administrators and see the types of plans that were being used to plan for the UK general election. It is clear that the general planning process for the election was fairly robust, largely due to the more substantial direct involvement on the part of the (A)RO and the public and high-profile nature of both the role and the results.

2.29 Generally, most (A)ROs worked from some form of action or project plan for the UK general election. In a large number of cases, these were long-standing plans from previous elections, built upon and tailored for the relevant election. In addition, some authorities established an election planning group to administer and run the elections effectively. Election planning meetings took place quite regularly in the months leading up to the election.

2.30 A large number of authorities collaborated with neighbouring local authorities in advance of the election. Some also invited key stakeholders to joint planning groups. Liaison occurred on a number of levels; some through election planning groups, while others met on a more informal basis to share knowledge and discuss relevant issues. Some authorities also worked together so that they could pool their resources to receive larger discounts from media and printing companies through joint procurement drives.

2.31 Most authorities noted that their planning initiatives were repeated year on year and improved or tailored to some degree and some also stated that they intended to repeat the establishment of planning groups and the development of election project plans. A small number of authorities noted that this was the

first year they had developed a plan and hoped to do so again for future elections.

2.32 Five of the (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report were downgraded from their original assessment for this standard following verification of their evidence. Birmingham, Islington, Liverpool, Manchester and Milton Keynes were moved from above the standard to meeting the standard.

2.33 The (A)ROs for Lambeth and West Berkshire were downgraded as they were not able to supply the required evidence to meet the standard, while the (A)RO for Bristol was downgraded following the issues outlined in paragraph 2.19. The (A)ROs for Carlisle and Canterbury said that they did not have formal contracts in place for some of their outsourced functions and the (A)RO for Canterbury also said that he did not have a formal written plan. The London Borough of Hammersmith and Fulham was below the standard in both 2009 and 2010. The (A)RO acknowledges that there is no single formal written plan with plans instead spread over numerous documents. These are due to be consolidated shortly. There has been an overall improvement in election planning since the 2009 European Parliamentary elections, where 20 ROs were below the standard. However, there was a much smaller proportion above the standard in 2010 (just under 30% across Great Britain).

2.34 There were also differences across England, Scotland and Wales with far more (A)ROs in Scotland being above the standard (58% – 18(A)ROs) compared to England (44% – 139 (A)ROs) and Wales (32% – seven (A)ROs). Our discussions with (A)ROs in Scotland and verification of their planning documents showed that they are making much better use of the planning and risk management tools available to them than in previous years. Some (A)ROs are involving business continuity officers and strategy officers within the council in developing their plans and risk registers for elections.

2.35 Over half of the (A)ROs in London were above the standard, saying that in addition to a formal written plan (which in most cases is a collection of the various documents covering specific areas), they carry out a full evaluation, including receiving feedback on the planning process from staff, voters, candidates and agents. Forty-four per cent of (A)ROs in the Midlands were also above the standard, with performance in the South East and North of England ranging from 40% (46) to 39% (28) above the standard respectively. In the South West 55% (18) of (A)ROs were above the standard.

2.36 The current performance standards framework looks to see whether ROs (and EROs) have a plan to carry out their core duties. The vast majority of (A)ROs we asked were able to provide their plans when we requested them, and we are happy with the progress being made in this area. However, as we continue to improve the framework, our aim will be to ensure in 2011 and beyond that the plans are robust and the key activities are being carried out.

2.37 We have seen some use of the planning templates that we provided alongside our guidance material, but we expect more use to be made of such materials and resources by (A)ROs and their staff.

Standard 3: Training

2.38 Standard 3 aims to ensure that (A)ROs have provided appropriate training for staff to deliver the election. This applies to both permanent and temporary staff within the electoral services team as well as polling station and count staff. In order to meet the standard, (A)ROs should have a written schedule of training activities for all staff involved in the election process and carries out an evaluation of training activities every year. In addition, all staff, particularly polling station and count staff, should receive training on access issues and disability awareness. Part B of the guidance manuals, *Managing a UK Parliamentary general election* and *Managing a local government election in England and Wales*, Part B, Section 6, 'Staffing' provides information on training of election staff.¹¹

2.39 Across Great Britain all but six (A)ROs (all in England) say that they meet the standard, and thereby have a written schedule of training activities, compared to 10 last year. In Scotland and Wales, all (A)ROs meet the standard with 13 officers in Scotland and eight officers in Wales saying they are above the standard. Just under a third of officers in England (92 (A)ROs) were above this standard.

2.40 The (A)RO for Wyre Forest District Council said that they were below the standard because ongoing training was not provided for temporary staff and there was no evaluation of training activities, although this would be done in the future. Due to the (A)RO not being able to supply any evidence to support their performance, Lambeth and Redbridge Borough's assessment was downgraded to below the standard, as was Bristol City Council, for reasons previously outlined. Liverpool and Newcastle upon Tyne City Councils were also downgraded following discussions with the (A)ROs, as there was evidence that incorrect training and advice had been given to election staff. In the case of Newcastle upon Tyne, incorrect advice was given at a training session regarding the action to be taken in the event of queues forming towards close of poll.

2.41 Across England, broadly speaking a ratio of two-thirds of (A)ROs met the standard, with just under a third (92 (A)ROs) above. In London, half of (A)ROs were above the standard. For the European Parliamentary elections in 2009, regional coordination in London was a major factor in the higher proportion of officers performing above the standard than in other regions. Although that particular structure was not in place for the UK general election, we have seen evidence of greater use of Association of Electoral Administrator training events

¹¹ The Electoral Commission, *Managing a UK Parliamentary general election*, available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0020/102836/Full-ARO-manual-March-2010.pdf and *Managing a local government election in England and Wales: guidance for Returning Officers*, available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0016/47131/Prelims-FINAL_27884-20515_E_W_.pdf.

in London and some lower level coordination, which could partly explain the higher numbers above this standard.

2.42 Overall, since the introduction of performance standards assessments nearly all (A)ROs now have a training schedule. Currently our standards do not measure the quality or completeness of the schedules or the training provided. In 2011 and beyond, we will focus more on the requirements and outcomes of a formal training plan.

Integrity

Standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of the election

2.43 The second subject area has one standard that covers the processes used by (A)ROs to ensure integrity in an election. Just under 95% (351) of (A)ROs in England met or exceeded the standard for integrity. Last year, performance at this standard was poorest, with 71 officers below the standard. There has been a marked improvement this year with only 21 officers below the standard (8 of whom were also below the standard last year). Again, all of these (A)ROs were in England.

2.44 Officers from district councils were less likely to report that they met the standard with 14 of the 21 officers below the standard in England from district councils. Officers from metropolitan borough councils were more likely to report that they met the standard and had no officers below standard. Four officers from London borough councils were below the standard, in addition to two from unitary authorities.

2.45 Since we have started collecting performance information against the standards, performance against this standard has generally been poor for both EROs and ROs, primarily due to the lack of formal processes in place to identify any patterns of activity that might indicate electoral malpractice or any issues of security. Nearly all (A)ROs meet the remainder of the criteria to achieve the standard, having contact with their police service Single Point of Contact (SPOC) and ensuring that work with political parties and independent candidates is carried out.

2.46 There was extensive public and media interest in the run-up to the 2010 UK general election. It would not be unreasonable to assume that electoral integrity would be one of the primary concerns for the (A)RO, over and above some of the other issues faced on the day. We would expect all (A)ROs to have a strong relationship with their SPOC for this election as well as with political parties, candidates and agents.

2.47 Of those (A)ROs who fell below the standard, the most common response we have received on the lack of a formal process is that a plan or formal process is not required by experienced staff who have been at the local authority for a number of years, as they are well placed to detect integrity issues without the need for a written plan. This reason has also been cited previously.

In addition, many feel that the lack of any history of integrity issues in their areas makes a formal plan very low on the list of priorities or unnecessary. However, we feel that it is important to have written documentation to cover processes such as integrity. We will continue to work with (A)ROs to ensure this happens in the future.

2.48 In the main though, most reported that they had frequent and useful contact with their local SPOC (for example, pre-election meetings) and some noted they held more formal briefings with candidates and agents. A number also mentioned that the police provided various forms of support and involvement at election time (such as attending polling stations and the count).

2.49 Many authorities noted that they had a formal integrity policy, with some explaining in detail the anti-fraud checking they carry out in-house (e.g. audit of households with multiple postal votes, or checking applications against other records such as council tax). Furthermore, some noted that council staff had carried out some form of fraud awareness training.

2.50 Each election brings new and different risks, and (A)ROs in particular need to recognise the need to be able to identify and manage the risk of electoral malpractice even in areas where historically there may be no prior track-record of allegations. Our priority is to ensure that people have confidence in the results of elections and in the integrity of electoral registration and voting processes, and we will work with (A)ROs to ensure this continues.

Participation

2.51 The final subject area includes three standards that cover the processes used by (A)ROs to communicate election information to electors and candidates and agents. Section 69 of the Electoral Administration Act 2006 requires that an (A)RO must 'take such steps as he thinks appropriate to encourage the participation by electors in the electoral process in the area for which he acts'.

2.52 In the months leading up to polling day, many EROs all over Great Britain carried out activities to promote electoral registration. These included:

- writing to all non-respondents to the annual canvass and directing them to their council's or our website
- canvassing or setting up a registration point on university campuses
- publicising the election in local authority magazines, on their websites and via Facebook and Twitter
- sending text message reminders
- displaying posters in a range of community locations such as schools, hospitals, train stations, and on buses

2.53 On top of local ERO activities, we ran a public awareness campaign across Great Britain in advance of the UK general and local elections on 6 May. The campaign aimed to increase the number of eligible people registered to vote and ran over a range of media including television, press, radio and online.

The campaign was particularly targeted at under-registered groups, including young adults, students, home-movers, private renters, and black and minority ethnic groups. This year also saw the first ever use of televised debates as a new medium to engage the general public in the election process.

2.54 In keeping with the other standards, there was an improvement from last year:

- Ninety per cent of (A)ROs (333) met or exceeded all three of the standards in this area. However, this was still the poorest performing area with 39 (A)ROs failing at least one of the three standards. This is, however, an improvement on last year, where 92 (A)ROs failed one or more of the standards in this area.
- Nearly all (A)ROs (97% – 360 (A)ROs) met or exceeded Standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity – an increase from just under 90% (333) last year.
- Ninety-two per cent of (A)ROs (343) met or exceeded Standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors. Although that represents an increase from 81% (309) from the previous year, performance at this standard remains poorer than at any other, with 30 officers below the standard.
- All but one (A)RO met or exceeded Standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents compared with five who were below the standard last year. Forty-five per cent were above the standard.

2.55 All of this work, in conjunction with the substantial work carried out by both EROs and (A)ROs has contributed to be a steady improvement in performance against Standard 5: Public awareness, with 12 (A)ROs below the standard, down from 45 in 2009. Seven of these were also below the standard last year. Although these (A)ROs were below the standard, this is not because they did not carry out any public awareness work, but because of the lack of a formal strategy. This is an issue that has been prominent for this standard for both EROs and ROs in the past, but we are pleased to note that the number falling below the standard is decreasing.

2.56 There was again some variation in performance by (A)ROs in different types of local authorities in England in relation to the three standards concerned with activities promoting participation in the UK general election. Officers from district councils in England were more likely to be below Standards 5 and 6, Public awareness and Accessibility of information to electors, respectively, while officers from London boroughs were more likely to report that they were above both these standards. A possible reason given for this was a lack of resources.

Accessibility of information

2.57 A key way to encourage participation is for (A)ROs to provide a simple and user friendly way for electors to access information and to cast their vote. This would include undertaking relevant research to decide on the type of format to use for written material and whether to provide information in different languages, appropriate to the local demographic of the area. Other considerations would be to ensure that polling stations were accessible to anyone who wished to cast their vote and that appropriate signage of information was present both inside and outside the polling station.

2.58 Just over 8% of (A)ROs (30) across Great Britain were below Standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors, the highest percentage at this level across all seven standards. This was also the poorest performing standard last year with 19% of officers (69) below the standard. However, the statistics do show an improvement on 2009 figures. This could be contributable to (A)ROs appearing to make better use of council research to inform their own activity, as opposed to having to do their own.

2.59 Although we welcome the improvement in this area compared with last year, we remain concerned about the lack of (A)ROs who are taking account of the needs of different audiences. SCOPE, Capability Scotland and Disability Action, published the findings of their own survey of polling station accessibility in June 2010,¹² which found that there had been a small improvement overall in the accessibility of polling stations since the 2001 and 2005 UK general elections. Areas highlighted in their report include:

- no tactile voting device to help the visually impaired to vote independently
- no large print version of the ballot paper
- no level access into the polling station, including an adequate ramp when required

2.60 Another important area includes the layout of the polling station, which in some areas contributed to some of the problems associated with the long queues seen on 6 May 2010. Our Interim report recommended that ROs should be given powers to use any public building as a polling station.

2.61 In general, performance for Standard 7: Candidates and agents was strong across England with nearly all officers across all authority types saying they either met or exceeded the standard. Only Harrogate District Council was below this standard as the (A)RO had not offered briefing sessions for candidates and agents, although this will be provided in the future. There were five officers below this standard last year. Officers from metropolitan and

¹² The Electoral Commission, *2010 UK Parliamentary general election – Interim report: review of problems at polling stations at close of poll on 6 May 2010* (May 2010), available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0010/99091/Interim-Report-Polling-Station-Queues-complete.pdf.

London boroughs, as well as unitary authorities, had higher proportions of officers reporting that they performed above this standard than the Great Britain average, with officers from district councils marginally lower. In London, nearly two-thirds of officers (20 (A)ROs) were above the standard.

2.62 Overall, the level of contact authorities reported undertaking with candidates, agents and political parties differed considerably, although most noted that they had carried out some type of formal briefing(s) with candidates and agents. Some authorities held more than one session (e.g. one for local elections and one for the UK general election, and/or a briefing before the election was called and one once the election was called). A few mentioned that they offered and/or held dedicated one-to-one sessions that covered, for example, completing nomination papers. A small number also said they maintained regular email and telephone contact with candidates and agents.

2.63 Some authorities said explicitly that they issued information packs (some via e-mail) with many noting that they included our own guidance (such as the *Guidance for candidates and agents*¹³). However, a handful noted they only made limited contact (e.g. via letter/e-mail/telephone). General information conveyed tended to relate to guidance on the nomination process, tellers, polling stations, postal vote openings, and details of the verification and count. A few (A)ROs also reported that they had or were going to request feedback (e.g. via a debrief session) from candidates and agents on how the process went.

¹³ The Electoral Commission, *Guidance for candidates and agents: The 2010 UK Parliamentary general elections in Great Britain* (December 2009) available at www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0006/83337/UKPGE-C-and-A-Final-web.pdf.

3 Performance in England

Queues at polling stations

3.1 Performance of (Acting) Returning Officers ((A)ROs) in England, broadly reflected that of Great Britain as a whole. However, a small minority of (A)ROs in England experienced high profile difficulties with polling station queues at the UK general election.

3.2 On 20 May 2010 we published an Interim report into the problems that took place. The report focused primarily on issues faced at the close of poll, with reports of queues forming outside some polling stations and some people in those queues apparently unable to vote by 10pm. Some factors we outlined that may have contributed to this included:

- evidence of poor planning assumptions in some areas
- use of unsuitable buildings and inadequate staffing arrangements at some polling stations
- contingency arrangements that were not properly triggered or were unable to cope with demand at the close of poll

3.3 We believe that everyone who has the right to vote should be able to do so. This principle underpins the performance standards framework and should be the primary aim of any (A)RO in planning for an election. In those areas that experienced these difficulties, we do not believe that any of the (A)ROs involved have succeeded in this task and there is evidence that a number of people who wanted to cast a vote were unable to do so. We have used the evidence available, which includes discussions with the (A)ROs in the affected areas and complaints made directly to us, in this performance assessment report.

3.4 Each (A)RO mentioned in our Interim report reported on their performance against the standards, and we have spoken to each of them as well as examining their supporting evidence and planning documentation.

3.5 Table 4 shows the performance of these (A)ROs against the three standards in the first subject area Planning and organisation. Where a change has been made following verification by us, the original assessment is in brackets.

Table 4: Performance of (Acting) Returning Officers highlighted in the Interim report for Planning and organisation

	Standard 1: Skills & knowledge	Standard 2: Planning	Standard 3: Training
Birmingham	Meet	Meet (Above)	Above
Hackney	Meet	Meet	Meet
Islington	Meet	Meet (Above)	Meet
Lewisham	Above	Above	Above
Liverpool	Below (Meet)	Meet (Above)	Below (Above)
Manchester	Meet	Meet (Above)	Meet
Milton Keynes	Below (Meet)	Meet (Above)	Meet
Newcastle-under-Lyme	Below (Meet)	Meet	Meet
Newcastle upon Tyne	Below (Meet)	Meet	Below (Meet)
Runnymede	Meet	Above	Above (Meet)
Sheffield	Meet	Meet	Meet

Planning and organisation

Skills and knowledge

3.6 In order to meet Standard 1: Skills and knowledge within the subject area Planning and organisation, some of the criteria that the (A)RO needs to satisfy include:

- awareness of the contents of our guidance and a working knowledge of the legislation to conduct the election
- ability to identify and oversee the necessary actions to rectify any errors in procedure
- commands the necessary staff and resources for a well-run election
- 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 and question any aspect of, and quality assure, the whole election process

3.7 In England, a small number of (A)ROs (seven in total, representing 2% of all officers) were below this standard. We spoke directly with the 11 (A)ROs mentioned in our Interim report and also looked at the evidence they used to report on their performance. In light of this, we decided that, based on the discussions and the evidence presented to us, four of these (A)ROs should be assessed below this standard. All four disagreed with our assessment, but based on the evidence we were provided with, as part of our performance standards work and the interviews that took place immediately following the

election and used in our Interim report, the assessments were downgraded. None of these officers were below the standard following the European Parliamentary elections in June 2009.

3.8 In the majority of these cases the (A)RO accepted that mistakes were made, in some cases due to incorrect planning assumptions and in other cases clear knowledge of what action to take in the event of queues forming. However the fact remains that the responsibility for the conduct of the election lies with the (A)RO and as such, for this election, in our view the (A)RO did not fulfil the duties of their role.

3.9 We were pleased to see that all of the officers involved have acted quickly to evaluate the issues that occurred and have acted to ensure that this situation will not arise again in future elections.

Plans and training

3.10 The Interim report published after the election identified that incorrect planning assumptions were the key factor that contributed to the build-up of queues at polling stations on 6 May. Across Great Britain there were eight (A)ROs below Standard 2: Planning, of which seven were in England. We were able to see and discuss the plans for the election with all the (A)ROs involved. In order to meet Standard 2: Planning, the (A)RO has to satisfy certain criteria including:

- clearly defined objectives and success measures
- identification and mitigation of risks
- detail of tasks and deadlines
- consideration of physical and communication accessibility, including a plan of the layout of the count premises

3.11 Just under 5% of officers across England were below this standard. Although we identified that in some cases, incorrect planning assumptions were used, the plans we have seen are sufficient to meet the criteria required for Standard 2: Planning. There is evidence that insufficient resources were allocated to polling stations with a large number of registered electors and that in some cases a higher turnout than 2005 was not anticipated. We have therefore downgraded some (A)ROs from above to meeting the standard. The current planning standard looks at whether an (A)RO has a plan and not the quality of the plan or the outcome of the planning process. Although the plans in place met the standards set by the Commission, the (A)ROs in question have accepted that they did not fully meet the standards they set for themselves in terms of service to electors. Ensuring that these shortcomings are not repeated will be key in 2011 and beyond.

3.12 Some of the problems that occurred took place in the larger metropolitan borough councils (Birmingham, Manchester, Liverpool, Newcastle upon Tyne and Sheffield). In these areas this was unexpected based on previous performance. However, the size of these areas meant that higher voter turnout

had significant impact. In our view, more consideration should have been given to the potential for this in planning the elections in these areas. Not enough consideration was given to the contingency arrangements for dealing with problems. All of these areas have carried out a thorough evaluation of the specific problems that occurred in order to ensure that they do not arise again in the future.

3.13 Other problems, such as in Hackney, occurred due to the combination of more than one election being held at the same time (in this case the UK general election, local government election and mayoral election) where planning assumptions were not found to be as robust as they should have been and the (A)RO did acknowledge that they faced difficulties carrying out three elections at the same time. With large parts of Great Britain facing combined electoral events in 2011 (a possible referendum on the UK Parliamentary voting system, local government and mayoral elections in England, Scottish Parliamentary and National Assembly for Wales elections all on 5 May 2011) the importance of planning for combined events is of critical importance. We will be working with local authorities to do everything we can to ensure that the process runs as smoothly as possible.

Integrity

3.14 There were 21 (A)ROs (6.6%) below the integrity standard in England, which compares with 71 the previous year following the European Parliamentary elections. One (A)RO (Islington) was downgraded from being above this standard to meeting it. More detail can be found in paragraphs 2.43 to 2.50.

Participation

3.15 Thirty-nine (A)ROs did not meet all the standards in this subject area. Of these, all but one was in England. Ninety-seven per cent of (A)ROs met or were above Standard 5: Planning and delivering public awareness activity. Twenty-seven per cent of these were above the standard. For Standard 6: Accessibility of information to electors, 91% of (A)ROs met or exceeded the standard, with 10% of those above standard. Ninety-nine per cent of (A)ROs met or exceeded Standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents. More detail can be found in paragraphs 2.51–2.63.

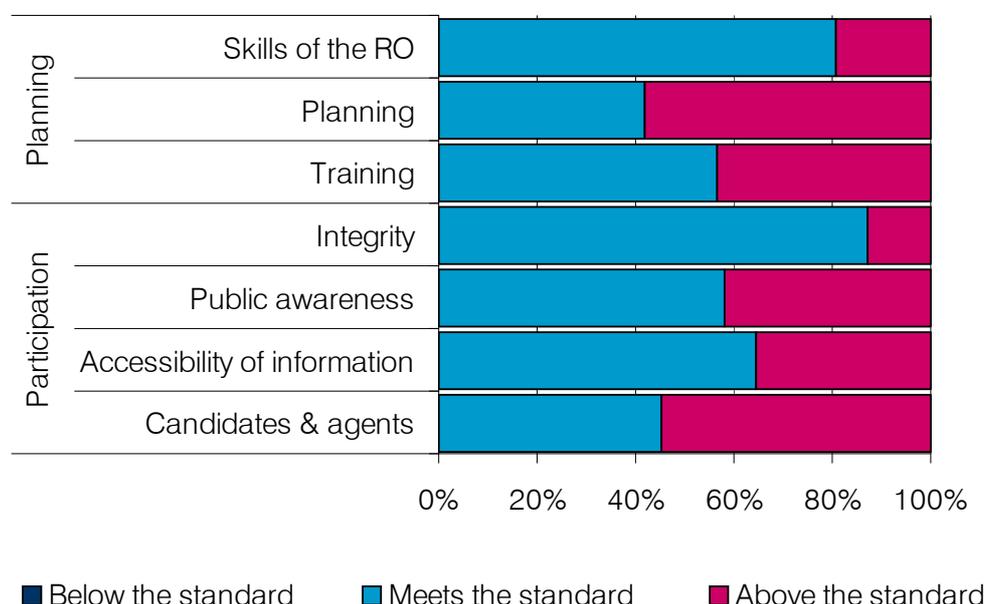
4 Performance in Scotland

4.1 Thirty-one Returning Officers (ROs) were responsible for the conduct of the UK general election in 59 constituencies in Scotland. Nine constituencies include parts of two or three local authorities and therefore close collaboration by the ROs involved is required. One constituency, Orkney & Shetland, is unique in Great Britain, comprising two local authorities. The RO for Orkney was in charge of the election in this constituency.

4.2 Performance against the standards by the 31 ROs in Scotland is shown in Chart 2. Overall, performance was higher than across Great Britain.

- All 31 ROs (representing 59 Scottish constituencies) met or exceeded all seven performance standards.
- Over half of ROs (18) were above Standard 2: Planning.
- Just over a third of ROs were above Standards 3 and 6: Training (13) and Public awareness (16), respectively, with over half (17) above Standard 7: Candidates and agents.

Chart 2: Performance of Returning Officers in Scotland against the standards



4.3 As a whole, ROs in Scotland performed strongly when compared with the performance of (Acting) Returning Officers ((A)ROs) across Great Britain: a higher proportion in Scotland met or exceeded the standard for all the performance standards than counterparts in England and Wales.

Planning and organisation

Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer

4.4 ROs in Scotland performed strongly in relation to this standard with all ROs assessing themselves either at or above the standard. Just under 80% of ROs met the standard with the remainder (six ROs) performing above the standard.

4.5 Five new ROs had been appointed since the 2009 European Parliamentary elections. Two of those had previously been Depute ROs and another had assisted with elections at their previous local authority. We held a briefing for all ROs on preparing for the UK general election and adjudicating doubtful ballots in early March 2010 in conjunction with the Interim Electoral Management Board for Scotland.

4.6 As part of our verification process we met with four ROs in Scotland to discuss their assessment. All of the ROs we spoke to were also Chief Executives of the local council.

Standard 2: Planning and training

4.7 Performance by ROs in Scotland against Standard 2: Planning was strong, with just under 60% above the standard (18 ROs). This was up substantially from a quarter of ROs above the standard after the European Parliamentary elections. Our verification found that ROs are making much greater and better use of planning and risk management tools than they have in previous years. Some ROs are involving business continuity officers and strategy officers within the council in developing their plans and risk registers for elections.

4.8 Performance by ROs in Scotland against Standard 3: Training also improved substantially. Almost 45% of ROs (13 in total) were above the standard in 2010 compared to four ROs in the previous year. We found that ROs were better at identifying the training needs of staff. They had also improved the way they evaluated the effectiveness of the training provided, which will assist them in making ongoing improvements.

Integrity

4.9 All ROs in Scotland met Standard 4: Integrity, with four ROs above the standard. We promoted partnership working between the police and ROs in order to prevent and detect electoral malpractice in 2010 through sessions at pre-election seminars and revising our guidance. ROs in turn have established and developed links with the police in the past year. This included some ROs inviting the police to brief polling station staff and candidates and agents on integrity issues. This work has helped to bring all ROs up to the standard.

Participation

4.10 All ROs in Scotland either met or exceeded all three standards in this subject area. Just over half of ROs met Standard 5: Public awareness, with the remainder above. This standard has been a generally poor performing area across Great Britain for both Electoral Registration Officers and ROs in the past two years that we have collected information against the standards. However, performance this year has seen a great improvement across Great Britain, with almost 70% meeting the standard.

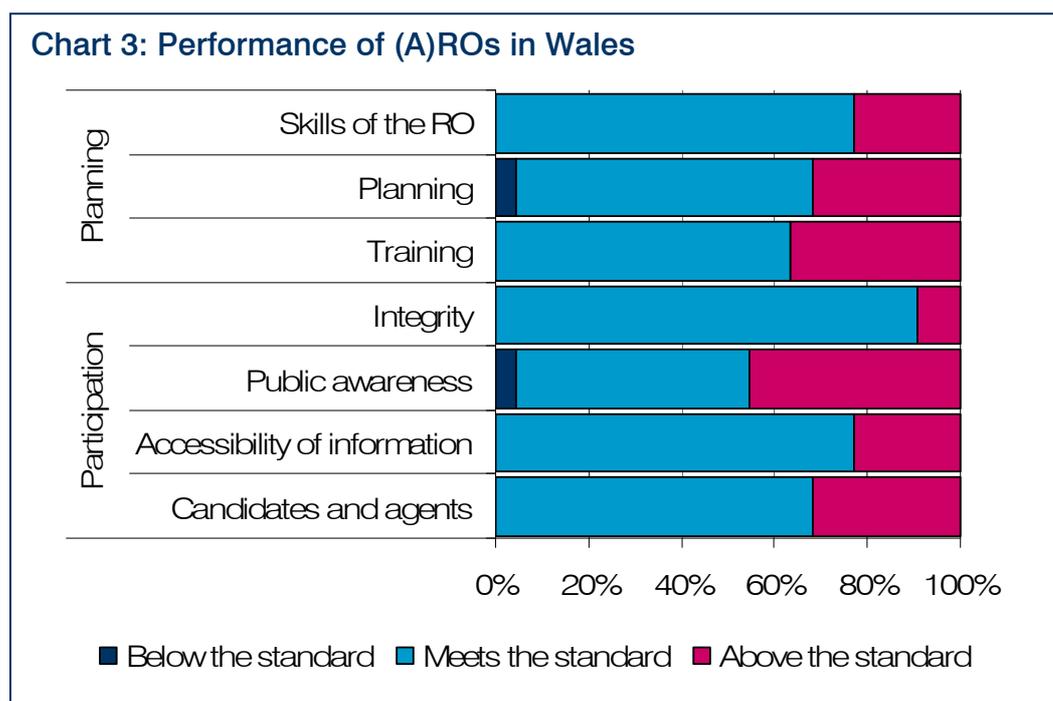
4.11 Together with local authority communications officers we have continued to develop the work that began in 2007 to promote public awareness of elections. We facilitated a seminar in November 2009 for communications officers to share ideas and experiences about how to create, implement and evaluate public awareness campaigns.

4.12 Just under two-thirds of ROs said that they met Standard 6: Accessibility of information, with the remainder above the standard. Last year there were three ROs below the standard (the largest number below any of the seven standards in Scotland). In the last year ROs have developed the work they do with groups that are less likely to participate in elections and organisations representing disabled people to improve the information they present to the electorate.

4.13 All ROs met the final standard, Standard 7: Candidates and agents. Over half of ROs were above the standard, an increase from six ROs in 2009 to 16 this year. Since the only scheduled election in Scotland in 2009 was the European Parliamentary elections, all bar one of the ROs did not have the opportunity to interact with candidates or their election agents last year. In 2010, all 31 ROs were responsible for at least one constituency and so dealt with nominations and provided briefings and information to candidates and agents. Also, more ROs were proactive in seeking feedback from candidates and agents during and after the election in order to improve performance.

5 Performance in Wales

5.1 The UK general election was the fourth successive set of elections across Wales. Year-on-year improvements have been made, resulting in well-planned and well-delivered elections in 2010. Chart 3 shows (Acting) Returning Officers' ((A)ROs') performance in Wales across the three subject areas.



5.2 As is the case across Great Britain as a whole, overall performance across the seven standards by (A)ROs in Wales has improved on last year. Following the assessment of Returning Officers' (ROs') performance at the European Parliamentary elections in 2009, we advised all (A)ROs on areas for improvement and highlighted our guidance and support materials that would help to achieve those improvements.

5.3 Areas of improvement in Wales relate particularly to integrity and participation:

- Twenty (A)ROs in Wales (91%) met or exceeded all of the standards compared to 13 (A)ROs (59%) last year.
- All but one (A)RO met or exceeded the three standards relating to planning.
- All (A)ROs met or exceeded Standard 4: Integrity.
- All but one (A)RO met or exceeded the three standards relating to participation.

Planning and organisation

5.4 In Wales, coordinated forward planning was achieved to a greater degree than for any previous UK general election. In the European Parliamentary election in 2009, there was a UK-wide approach to planning on an electoral region basis and the Regional Returning Officer gave a strong lead to Wales-wide planning. In National Assembly for Wales elections, coordination is required across each of the five Assembly electoral regions, also giving spur to a consistent, Wales-wide approach. By contrast, there is no formal UK-wide election management structure in place for a UK general election. Nevertheless, ROs agreed to take forward the management arrangements in place in Wales for the European Parliamentary elections, successfully maintaining them for the UK general election.

5.5 As a result, three regional meetings of (A)ROs were held in January and February 2010, facilitated by us and led by the European Parliamentary Regional RO. Common approaches were agreed on key issues of election management. In turn this fed through to the Wales-wide pre-election seminar for electoral administrators held in February.

5.6 Additional briefing sessions on election management were also held for new (A)ROs, again facilitated by us and led by the Regional Returning Officer. We also visited each new (A)RO in advance of the election, to talk through key elements of the role of (A)RO, our performance standards scheme, and to promote our guidance products and support services.

5.7 The continued Wales-wide focus on planning has resulted in consistently better planned elections at constituency level throughout Wales.

Standard 1: Skills and knowledge of the Returning Officer

5.8 (A)ROs in Wales performed strongly against this standard with no officers below the standard, and five officers above the standard. This is an increase from three officers above the standard last year. As identified in relation to the planning and organisation subject area, (A)ROs in Wales were personally engaged in pre-election briefings and seminars for the second successive year. They were consequently well-informed on relevant changes in electoral law and procedure; were able to agree common approaches to key issues and share local strategies and examples of good practice.

5.9 As part of our verification process, we held personal discussions with a quarter of (A)ROs in Wales.

Standard 2: Planning

5.10 Performance by (A)ROs in Wales against Standard 2: Planning was strong, with 14 officers (64%) of (A)ROs meeting the standard and the remainder exceeding the standard. There was, however, one officer who was below the

standard, because not all planning documents were in place, where last year there had been none.

Standard 3: Training

5.11 Similarly, all 22 (A)ROs in Wales met or exceeded Standard 3: Training. Eight (A)ROs said they exceeded the standard, an increase from three last year. Pre-election seminar discussions of (A)ROs have continued to place an emphasis on the importance and quality of training polling station staff in order to improve the polling station experience of voters. This has meant that training standards across Wales have improved, especially over the last two years.

Integrity

5.12 All (A)ROs met or exceeded Standard 4: Maintaining the integrity of an election. This is the highest increase in performance across all seven standards in Wales, where previously five officers had been below this standard.

5.13 This reflects a concerted effort across Wales to achieve improvements since 2009. Ahead of the election, three regional meetings were between electoral services managers and police Single Points of Contact, to promote joint working, and our guidance products and template integrity plans were promoted. The outcome was that a consistently improved level of strategic planning and working to prevent problems was achieved ahead of the 2010 elections.

Participation

5.14 The majority of (A)ROs in Wales met or exceeded Standard 5: Public awareness. One (A)RO was below the standard, which is an improvement from the two that were below the standard last year. Ten (A)ROs are above the standard, an increase from three last year, and the highest number of officers above the standard out of all seven standards.

5.15 A Wales-wide initiative established for the 2009 European Parliamentary elections was maintained in the different context of the UK general election. We had facilitated the All-Wales Public Awareness Group in 2009 with a focus on providing effective public information on the elections.

5.16 This strategic forum continued for the UK general election, with each (A)RO being asked to nominate a representative. The aim was to coordinate key promotional messages across Wales. An autumn planning seminar was structured specifically to assist local authorities in Wales meet our performance standards on communication and public awareness. This initiative did contribute to the improvement seen at this performance standard.

5.17 All (A)ROs in Wales reported that they met or exceeded Standard 6: Accessibility and communication of information, three of which were below this standard last year. There was also an increase in officers above the standard, with five officers above the standard this year compared to just one last year.

5.18 All (A)ROs met or exceeded Standard 7: Communication of information to candidates and agents. Again, this is an improvement on last year's performance where one officer was below the standard. There has also been an increase in the officers above this standard, where seven officers were above the standard compared to no officers above the standard last year.

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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