

Priority	Medium
Event specific	2013 postponed canvass
Action required	Yes
Area	Great Britain
Retain	June 2014
Circular reference	EC01(2013)

## Direction to report under Section 9B(1) of the Political Parties, Elections and Referendums Act 2000 (PPERA) – performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers in Great Britain

15 July 2013

### Purpose

1. This circular:
  - is a **direction** to Electoral Registration Officers (EROs) in Great Britain to report on their performance against the current performance standards for EROs
  - **requests** supplementary data from all EROs to support their performance standards return
  - **seeks feedback** on the definition of ‘timely’ in respect of supply of the electoral register

### Background

2. The Electoral Commission has the power to set performance standards for Electoral Registration Officers (EROs), Returning Officers (ROs) and Counting Officers in relation to specified elections and referendums, and a duty to publish assessments of the level of performance by these officers against the standards.

3. In July 2008 the Commission published performance standards for EROs and has monitored and reported on the performance of EROs against these standards in each year since.<sup>1</sup>
4. Given the significant change to existing processes that the transition to individual electoral registration (IER) will involve, we are developing a new performance standards framework to support EROs in meeting the challenges inherent in delivering the transition. We have been [consulting on the new standards](#) since May, and intend to publish the revised framework by the end of September 2013. In addition, we are currently working with Cabinet Office to develop a timetable for EROs which will cover all monitoring requirements until the start of the transition which we aim to make available with the final version of the performance standards in September. We are committed to working with Cabinet Office to ensure that we co-ordinate requests for information so that the process is as straightforward as possible for EROs and their staff and the requests are not duplicated, recognising the increasing pressure on local authority resources.
5. In the meantime, we intend to use the current standards to monitor performance in advance of the 2013/14 household canvass, which EROs will want to ensure is as comprehensive as possible in order to achieve registers that are as accurate and complete as possible ahead of the scheduled 2014 polls and the transition to IER. It will help with the transition process, as an effective canvass will help to maximise the number of existing electors who are confirmed during the transition, which will in turn help to reduce the number of electors that you will need to follow up with and invite to register individually under the new process.
6. We have been working to try to improve the process for completing and submitting performance standards returns. In particular, we have introduced a web-based process for RO returns, where we are ask each RO to complete online returns rather than Excel spreadsheets. Following positive feedback from a trial of this approach at the May 2013 polls, we now intend to introduce a similar system to collect ERO performance standards returns.

## Direction to report for EROs

7. This direction to report is issued by the Electoral Commission under Section 9B(1) of PPERA. It requires you to provide the Electoral Commission with a report of your performance against the standards for Electoral Registration Officers published on 21 July 2008 under Section 9A(1) of PPERA.
8. In order to comply with this direction you must complete and submit your performance standards return **by no later than 5pm on Friday 23 August 2013**.

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<sup>1</sup> The current performance standards for EROs can be found at: [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/\\_data/assets/pdf\\_file/0007/57949/Performancestandards-2008-06-25\\_final-webres.pdf](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/_data/assets/pdf_file/0007/57949/Performancestandards-2008-06-25_final-webres.pdf).

9. A link to the online return to be used by EROs to report on performance against the standards will be sent to each ERO by no later than 9 August 2013.
10. The online return will ask you to:
  - confirm your performance against the standards
  - provide narrative in support of your assessment of your performance against the standards, including where your approach has changed since you last reported on your performance
11. Please note that for performance standard 3: house-to-house enquiries, you will be required to confirm that you carry out a personal canvass of all households you have not received a response from or been able to confirm through secondary checks and if not, to explain the reasons why.
12. Wherever we identify that an ERO may not be meeting one or more of our performance standards, we will of course be in touch to follow this up.

## Evidence to support assessment

13. In addition to submitting a monitoring return, we will require a sample of EROs to submit supporting evidence as outlined in the standards. EROs who are selected as part of the sample are required to submit their supporting evidence by e-mail, **by no later than 5pm on Friday 23 August 2013**.
14. A minimum sample of 10% will be selected on the basis of risk. Specifically, it will include all EROs who did not meet one or more of the performance standards at the last assessment. The Commission will also select additional EROs to include in the sample on the basis of risk, taking into account factors such as the experience of the ERO and previous issues as well as any other available information.
15. EROs who are selected to be included in the minimum 10% sample will be notified of that fact by their local Commission team by not later than 31 July 2013.
16. We will review the evidence provided to us and will provide feedback to those EROs where the evidence does not appear to demonstrate that the criteria of the standards are being met and where we have recommendations for improvements by not later than Friday 27 September 2013.

## Supplementary data

17. In addition to the submission of your online return, all EROs are also requested to complete and return a supplementary data collection form which will be used alongside the online return to enable us to make a better informed assessment of each ERO's performance against the standards.
18. We envisage that the data requested will mirror that requested in previous years, which electoral management software suppliers are already aware of,

in order to make the process as straightforward as possible for EROs. The Excel-based form will be made available by 1 October 2013. EROs in England will be required to complete the data return by 28 February 2014, and EROs in Scotland and Wales by 21 March 2014.

19. As set out in our report on [ERO performance in 2012](#), we will continue to work with EROs to ensure that the data collected is as robust as possible. It is important that EROs are making full use of the information available to them and understand what it tells them about their own performance. During the transition to IER this will be particularly important, supporting an assessment of how effective the processes employed by the ERO are being, with the available data being used to keep their arrangements under review throughout the transition.

## Guidance and supporting resources

20. We have issued guidance to support EROs in managing the postponed canvass, which is contained in the first part of our IER guidance, [Preparing for IER](#). This guidance supplements the existing guidance contained in [Part C of the Commission's guidance manual for EROs](#).
21. EROs can also find our general planning tools, including template project plans and risk registers, and other resources for the canvass on our website at [www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration](http://www.electoralcommission.org.uk/guidance/resources-for-electoral-administrators/electoral-registration).

## Supply of the electoral register

22. Performance standard 5: Supply and security aims to ensure that, once published, EROs make the full register available for public inspection and supply copies of the register and absent voter lists to those entitled to receive them, whether by right or on request, including political parties and candidates, the Office for National Statistics and the British Library.
23. To support verification of performance against this standard, we asked the political parties on our UK Political Parties Panel, and Scottish and Welsh equivalents, to highlight to us any issues they are aware of regarding supply of the electoral register. In response to this, we received some feedback to suggest that there were instances where the register had not been supplied within the timeframes they had expected, and we followed up with the individual EROs in each of these cases to ensure that supply had been completed.
24. **As set out in our report on [ERO performance in 2012](#), we now want to consult with both EROs and recipients of the register to clarify what an acceptable timeframe for supply is**, which will then form the basis against which assessments of performance against this standard will be made.
25. With this in mind, we propose:

- On publication of the register or on receipt of a valid request, EROs are to supply copies of the register and absent voter lists to those entitled to receive them within 7 calendar days.

26. Please note that this definition does not apply to the supply of the register during an election period, where provision of the register to a candidate making a valid request should be made as soon as possible.

27. We would welcome views from EROs and their staff on the timeframe set out above, and will similarly be contacting recipients of the register for their views. Please send any comments to your [local Commission team](#) by no later than 9 August 2013. We will notify EROs of the agreed timeframes, and update our guidance where necessary by no later than 13 August 2013 in order to give EROs sufficient time to incorporate into their planning.

## Contact

28. For further information please contact your [local Commission team](#).

This circular is for the attention of:

**The Electoral Registration Officer**

District, metropolitan borough and London borough authorities in England  
Unitary authorities in England and Wales  
Unitary authorities and joint boards in Scotland

This circular is for the information of:

**The Acting Returning Officer**

Parliamentary constituencies in England and Wales

**The Returning Officer**

Parliamentary constituencies in Scotland

**The Returning Officer**

District, metropolitan borough and London borough authorities in England  
Unitary authorities in England, Scotland and Wales

**The Chief Electoral Officer**

Northern Ireland

This document was approved and issued by Peter Wardle, Chief Executive of the Electoral Commission.