

In our December bulletin we mentioned that we would be previewing the questions for our Annual Return 2010 in advance of the end of the financial year. This is to give monitoring officers more time to prepare their responses and to consult with their standards committees, before we request that completed returns are submitted online at the year end.

The questions are attached to this email, along with some brief guidance notes that offer further explanation about what is being asked and why.

The focus of last year's annual return was to tease out a narrative of the activities that standards committee had undertaken in the first year of the new local framework. Many questions were left open, so that you had the freedom to provide us with as much information as you felt necessary.

This year our approach is slightly different. Using information from last year's responses, we have designed a "tick box" questionnaire. This means that there are less open questions which should make the return quicker and easier to complete. However, you have not lost the opportunity to provide us with a narrative. Most of the tick-box lists have an option for "other", which, when ticked, opens up a free text box for you to type in. The rationale behind this is so that you need only type in a response when the activity you are describing is not included in our list. We are hopeful that this will make it easier for us to identify notable practice to share with the rest of the standards community.

The attached preview of the questions shows the Annual Return in its entirety. Depending on the circumstances of your authority, you may not need to answer all of the questions. The online version will only display the ones that are relevant to your authority.

We will be in touch soon with further information about when the submission period will be. It is likely to be a 10 working day window, much like the quarterly return, either at the end of March or beginning of April.

We will also provide you with a more detailed user guide to help you complete the return online.

In the meantime, if you have any questions about the Annual Return 2010, please do not hesitate to contact our monitoring team on 0161 817 5300 or at authorityreturns@standardsforengland.gov.uk

Yours sincerely

The Monitoring Team

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