

# Annual return 2026: Frequently asked questions

Answers to common questions about completing and submitting your 2026 annual return, the new requirement to publish it on your own website, and the combined data collection with Social Care Wales.

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# 1. About the annual return

## 1.1 What is the annual return?

The annual return is an online form registered adults and children's services providers are legally required to complete each year under the **Regulations and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016 (RISCA)** (<https://law.gov.wales/regulation-and-inspection-social-care-wales-act-2016>). It contains information about your service, including staffing, capacity, and how you deliver care. The purpose of annual returns is to provide the public with comprehensive, comparable and robust information on the quality of care and support services.

## 1.2 Which services need to complete an annual return?

The following service types are required to submit an annual return:

- Care home services
- Domiciliary services
- Secure accommodation services
- Residential family centre services
- Regulated fostering services
- Regulated adoption services
- Regulated advocacy services
- Adult placement services
- Special School Residential services

## 1.3 What period does the annual return cover?

The annual return covers the previous financial year.

## 1.4 Do newly registered providers need to submit an annual return?

Yes. If your service was registered during the financial year to which the annual return relates, you are required to submit an annual return.

If a service was approved during the reporting period but was not operational at any time during that period or dormant throughout, you must still include it in your annual return.

### **1.5 Does an annual return need to be submitted for a service that has been removed from registration at some point during the relevant year?**

No. If a regulated service has been removed from your registration, you do not need to include information about that service in your annual return.

### **1.6 What happens if the legal entity of the service provider has changed?**

If your legal entity has changed, you should contact the CIW registration team immediately to discuss your circumstances before completing your return. Call us on 0300 7900 126 and select option 1.

If a new provider has purchased a service and registered it under a new legal entity, the annual return should only cover the period from the date of the new registration.

### **1.7 I recently became a Responsible Individual. Do I complete the annual return from when I took over, or for the whole reporting period?**

The annual return is a provider return, not an individual return. It must cover the full reporting period regardless of when you became the Responsible Individual.

## **2. What's new for 2026**

### **2.1 What is different about the 2026 annual return?**

There are two significant changes for 2026 that all providers need to be aware of:

- You are now legally required to publish your annual return on your own website by 30 June 2026. This is a new legal requirement under the **Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025** (<https://law.gov.wales/health-and-social-care-wales-act-2025>). Care Inspectorate Wales will no longer publish annual returns on behalf of providers.
- The 2026 annual return includes additional workforce questions as part of a new unified data collection process with Social Care Wales. This means you will complete one return each year instead of two separate data collections.

## **2.2 Why is there a new publication requirement?**

The **Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025** (<https://law.gov.wales/health-and-social-care-wales-act-2025>) introduces greater transparency and accountability for regulated care services in Wales. Publishing your annual return on your own website ensures that people who use your service, their families, and the wider public can access information about your service directly.

## **2.3 Will the annual return form look different this year?**

The form will have a similar structure to previous years, but it will be longer due to the additional workforce questions collected on behalf of Social Care Wales.

Some questions have been simplified, and some have been removed. Where you provided narrative responses in last year's return, these have been pre-populated for you to review and update as needed. This should reduce the time needed to complete certain sections.

## **2.4 Why is the form longer this year?**

The additional length reflects the inclusion of workforce questions that Social Care Wales previously collected separately through their own annual workforce survey. By combining the two collections, you will complete one return instead of two, saving time overall.

In future years, information you provide this year will be pre-populated, making the process quicker still.

# **3. Key dates**

## **3.1 When does the annual return submission window open?**

The annual return submission window opens on 1 April 2026.

## **3.2 What is the deadline for submitting my annual return?**

You must submit your annual return by 23:59 on 26 May 2026.

### 3.3 Can I submit the annual return after the deadline?

No. Once the deadline has passed, the online system will close and you will no longer be able to submit your annual return. If you have not submitted by the deadline, contact CIW as soon as possible on 0300 7900 126 or at [ciw@gov.wales](mailto:ciw@gov.wales) (<mailto:ciw@gov.wales>).

### 3.4 Can I complete my annual return before 1 April 2026?

No. The annual return window opens on 1 April 2026. You cannot access or submit your annual return before this date.

## 4. Accessing and submitting the annual return

### 4.1 How do I access the annual return?

The annual return is accessed through your **CIW Online account** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>).

### 4.2 What if I don't have a CIW Online account?

All Responsible Individuals (RIs) must have created a **CIW Online account** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>) as part of the application process to become a RI for a service.

If you do not have a CIW Online account and need to complete the annual return:

1. If you are an RI who needs to activate your online account you can do so by entering the relevant information into CIW Online.
2. If you are an Online Assistant or Organisation Officer who does not currently have a CIW Online account you can ask an RI associated to a service within the provider group to invite you to create a CIW Online account.

### 4.3 Who can fill in the annual return?

Responsible Individuals, Organisation Officers and Online Assistants can fill in the annual return. However, only Responsible Individuals and Organisation Officers who have activated their **CIW Online account** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>) will be able to make the relevant declarations and submit the annual return on behalf of the provider.

#### **4.4 Who can submit the annual return?**

The Responsible Individual(s) or Organisational Officer(s) who have activated their **CIW Online account** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>) can submit the annual return.

#### **4.5 Can only one person complete the annual return, or can colleagues help?**

More than one person can help. Anyone associated with the provider can assist in completing the annual return, and anyone with an activated **CIW Online account** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>) can log in and view the draft return. The return can be completed in any order and across multiple sessions.

Declarations must be completed last by the Responsible Individual, once all other information has been entered.

#### **4.6 Does the annual return need to be completed in one sitting?**

No. The annual return does not need to be completed in one sitting and can be worked on by multiple people over several sessions.

You can save your progress and return to the form as many times as needed before submitting.

#### **4.7 Can a Responsible Individual sign the declaration for a service they are not designated for?**

No. Only the designated Responsible Individual (RI) can sign the declaration of truth for their service. Where a provider operates more than one service, other RIs are not permitted to sign declarations for services they are not designated for. However, where there is no RI in place, or the RI is expected to be absent for 28 days or more, the annual return provides an alternative declaration that can be completed by another RI or Organisational Officer within the provider organisation.

#### **4.8 There is an error with the pre-populated information in my annual return. What should I do?**

If you identify any registration-related information that needs to be corrected, you can submit a notification or variation via **CIW Online** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>). The annual return must reflect the core registration data held by CIW as at 31 March 2026. It is your responsibility to ensure your registration information is kept up to date and accurate throughout the year.

## 4.9 What if I experience technical difficulties accessing the annual return?

If you have difficulty accessing the annual return form, contact CIW on 0300 7900 126 and select option 4, or email [ciw@gov.wales](mailto:ciw@gov.wales) (<mailto:ciw@gov.wales>).

## 4.10 The annual return asks how many people we have provided support to. How do we calculate this?

The question asks for the total number of people you provided care and support to during the year, not the number at any one point in time. To calculate this for a care home service, take your starting occupancy at the beginning of the financial year and add the total number of admissions made during that year.

Where you have provided care and support to an individual more than once during the year, each episode of care should be counted separately.

## 4.11 Can I provide supporting evidence with my annual return?

No. You are not required to provide evidence to support the information in your annual return.

# 5. The new publication requirements

## 5.1 What do I need to do after I have submitted my annual return?

When you submit your annual return, two separate documents will become available in your CIW Online account. It is important to understand the difference between them.

### Transaction copy

Immediately after you submit your annual return, a transaction copy will be available in your CIW Online account. This is a full record of your submission for your own records only. It is clearly marked "not for publication" and must not be published on your website.

### Publication copy

Within 30 minutes of submission\*, a separate publication copy will also be available to download from your CIW Online account. This is the version you must publish on your own website by 30 June 2026. It contains only the information required to be made publicly available.

**\*Please note (2026 only):** The publication copy functionality will not be available when the annual return window opens on 1 April. If you submit before early May, your publication copy will not be generated immediately. It will be created automatically once the functionality is ready. CIW will let you know when your publication copy is available to download.

Guidance on how to download your annual return publication copy will be available at [Annual return | Care Inspectorate Wales \(https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return\)](https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return) from early May.

## 5.2 Will I receive a copy of my annual return straight away after submitting?

Immediately after you submit your annual return, a **transaction copy** will be generated and available in your [CIW Online account \(https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login\)](https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login). This is a full record of everything you submitted to CIW and is for your own records only. It will be clearly marked to indicate that it is not the version for publication. **You must not publish the transaction copy on your website.**

Within 30 minutes of submission\*, a separate **publication copy** will also be available to download from your CIW Online account. This is the version you must publish on your website by 30 June 2026.

For full details on both documents and what to do after submitting, see Q27.

**\*Please note (2026 only):** The publication copy functionality will not be available when the annual return window opens on 1 April. If you submit before early May, your publication copy will not be generated immediately. It will be created automatically once the functionality is ready. CIW will let you know when your publication copy is available to download.

## 5.3 How do I download my submitted annual return?

After submission, you can access and download your annual return from the Annual Return main page in your [CIW Online account \(https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login\)](https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login). Click the download button for the relevant year and a version of your annual will be generated for you to save and publish. Your annual return will be available to download in multiple format.

Guidance on how to download your annual return publication copy will be available at [Annual return | Care Inspectorate Wales \(https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return\)](https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return) from early May.

## **5.4 What is the difference between the 'transaction copy' and the 'publication copy' of my annual return?**

When you submit your annual return, two separate documents become available in your **CIW Online account** (<https://online.careinspectorate.wales/#/login>).

### **Transaction copy**

Immediately after you submit, a transaction copy is generated. This is a full record of everything you submitted to CIW and is for your own records only. It will be clearly marked to indicate that it is not the version for publication. You must not publish the transaction copy on your website.

### **Publication copy**

Within 30 minutes of submission, a separate publication copy is also generated. This contains only the information that is required to be made publicly available. Within the annual return, each question is clearly labelled to show whether it will be included in this version. This is the version you must publish on your website by 30 June 2026.

## **5.5 Can I also download a copy of my annual return before I submit?**

Yes. Once you have entered all the required information, go to the 'Declare and submit' page where you will have the options to download a copy of your annual return before submitting. This can be useful if you need to share a draft with colleagues for internal approval before submission.

## **5.6 Where on my website do I need to publish my annual return?**

There is no set requirement about where on your website you publish your annual return. You can choose to publish it on your homepage, a dedicated page, or anywhere else on your website. What matters is that it is publicly accessible and published by 30 June 2026.

## **5.7 Does my annual return need to be directly downloadable, or can it be embedded on the page?**

Your annual return will be available to download from your CIW Online account in multiple formats, including PDF and HTML. You can publish it on your website as a downloadable file, a webpage, or both.

## 5.8 How long do I need to keep my annual return published on my website?

The purpose of annual returns is to provide the public with transparent and comparable information about registered services. Although the regulations don't specify a duration for keeping an annual return on your website, we would expect providers to keep their annual return published for one year, until the subsequent and most up to date annual return has been published. We believe this practice aligns with the underlying intention and ensures continued transparency for the public.

## 5.9 Do I need to remove previous years' annual returns from my website, or should I keep them all published?

You may decide whether to keep the previous year's annual returns published on your website.

## 5.10 What if I don't have a website?

You will need to create a website before 30 June 2026 to meet the new legal requirement under the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025. CIW will not be able to publish your annual return on your behalf.

## 5.11 Can I publish the annual return on my social media page instead of a website?

The [Health and Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2025 \(https://law.gov.wales/health-and-social-care-wales-act-2025\)](https://law.gov.wales/health-and-social-care-wales-act-2025) states that the:

"Service provider must following the end of each financial year during which the provider is registered-

(a)submit an annual return to the Welsh Ministers;

(b)publish that return on its website."

A social media page does not meet this requirement. You must publish your annual return on **your own** website.

## 5.12 Where on my website should I publish my annual return?

There is no specific requirement about where on your website you publish your annual return. It is your decision whether to publish it on your homepage, a dedicated page, or elsewhere. The important thing is that it is published and publicly accessible by 30 June 2026.

## 5.13 I run multiple services. Do I need to publish an annual return for each one?

The annual return is a provider-based return, which means it covers all of your services in a single submission. You will need to publish your submitted annual return, which covers all your services, on your website by 30 June 2026.

However, if your services are operated under different legal entities and are registered separately with CIW, each legal entity must complete and publish its own annual return.

## 5.14 What happens if I don't publish my annual return on my website by 30 June 2026?

Failure to publish your annual return on your website by the deadline is an offence under the [Health and Social Care \(Wales\) Act 2025 \(https://law.gov.wales/health-and-social-care-wales-act-2025\)](https://law.gov.wales/health-and-social-care-wales-act-2025). This may result in enforcement action as deemed appropriate by CIW.

We strongly encourage all providers to act early and contact us at [ciw@gov.wales](mailto:ciw@gov.wales) (<mailto:ciw@gov.wales>) if you are experiencing difficulties publishing your annual return.

## 5.15 Will CIW continue to publish annual returns on its own website?

From 2026, Care Inspectorate Wales will no longer publish annual returns on behalf of providers. Annual returns previously published on the CIW website will be removed 90 days after the close of this year's annual return window. Members of the public wishing to view a provider's annual return should visit the provider's own website.

## 6. Unified data collection with Social Care Wales

### 6.1 What is the unified data collection?

From 2026, Care Inspectorate Wales and **Social Care Wales** (<https://socialcare.wales/>) are combining their data collection processes. CIW's annual return and Social Care Wales's annual workforce collection are being merged into a single return. This means you will complete one return instead of two separate data collections each year.

### 6.2 Why are CIW and Social Care Wales combining their data collection?

The aim is to simplify the process, align data across both organisations, and save you time. Rather than completing separate returns for two different organisations each year, you will provide all the information once and it will be shared between us.

### 6.3 What will happen with my data?

By completing your 2026 annual return, your workforce data will automatically be shared with both CIW and Social Care Wales as part of the unified data collection process.

### 6.4 Will any personal data about staff or service users be included in the published annual return?

Personal data about individuals **should not** be included in your annual return.

Personally identifiable information includes gendered pronouns combined with further identifying details such as health conditions, details of care and support needs, dates of admission, initials, or location within the service. Remember that more than one piece of information together can be enough to identify a person.

Care should also be taken when using direct quotes from family members, as these can inadvertently identify individuals. It is your responsibility to ensure your annual return does not include personally identifiable information before you submit and publish it.

### 6.5 How are the workforce questions different from the rest of the annual return?

The workforce questions are not built into the annual return form in the same way as other questions. Instead, you will be prompted to download a separate spreadsheet from within your annual return. You will need to complete this spreadsheet with your workforce information and then upload it back into your annual return before you submit.

## **6.6 How many workforce spreadsheets do I need to complete?**

The number of spreadsheets you need to complete depends on the type of provider you are.

All providers must complete one workforce spreadsheet for each service they operate. For example, if you operate three services, you will need to complete three separate spreadsheets. All providers must also complete one spreadsheet covering staff employed at provider level.

If you are a local authority provider, you will also need to complete a separate spreadsheet for each type of social service team you operate.

Please note that workforce spreadsheet templates are only available to download from within your annual return in your CIW Online account.

## **6.7 Who can complete the workforce spreadsheet?**

The workforce spreadsheet can be completed offline and by any number of people within your organisation. The spreadsheet can be completed across multiple sessions and by more than one person before it is uploaded back into your annual return.

You do not need to be a Responsible Individual or Organisational Officer to fill in the spreadsheet itself, which means you can share it with colleagues who have the relevant information, such as HR staff or managers.

## **6.8 Who needs to upload the completed workforce spreadsheet?**

Once the spreadsheet has been completed, it must be uploaded back into the annual return by a Responsible Individual (RI) or Organisational Officer (OO) with an activated CIW Online account. Only an RI or OO can complete this step.

## **6.9 When do I need to upload the workforce spreadsheet?**

The completed spreadsheet must be uploaded into your annual return before you submit it. You cannot submit your annual return without completing this step.

## **6.10 What happens if there is an error in my workforce spreadsheet?**

When you upload your completed spreadsheet, the system will automatically check the data. If it identifies any errors, you will receive a message telling you exactly which sections need to be corrected. You will not be able to submit your annual return until any errors have been resolved and the spreadsheet has been successfully uploaded.

## 6.11 Can I save my progress and come back to the workforce spreadsheet later?

Yes. As with the rest of the annual return, you can save your progress and return to it across multiple sessions. Then upload the completed spreadsheet back into the annual return.

# 7. Language

## 7.1 What language should I complete the annual return in?

Independent service providers can choose to complete and publish their annual return in Welsh only, English only, or in both languages. If you choose to publish in both languages, the system will automatically generate the questions that need to be completed in both languages and will produce a Welsh version and an English version of your annual return upon publication.

You will need to provide responses in both languages for any bilingual questions.

Under the **Welsh Language Standards** (<https://www.welshlanguagecommissioner.wales/regulation/welsh-language-standards>), all local authority service providers are required to provide publicly available information in Welsh and English.

# 8. After submitting your annual return

## 8.1 Once the annual return has been submitted, can it be changed?

CIW expects providers to check and agree the content of their annual return before submission. Once submitted, the annual return cannot be amended. If you believe your submitted annual return contains an error, contact CIW as soon as possible on 0300 7900 126.

## 8.2 What does CIW do with the information I provide in my annual return?

The primary purpose of the annual return is to provide the public with comprehensive, comparable and robust information on the quality of care and support services. The information you provide enables CIW to collate and publish sector level data and information which can be used to provide insights and inform local and national planning. From 2026, data is also shared with **Social Care Wales** (<https://socialcare.wales/>) as part of the unified data collection process.

### **8.3 Will the information I provide be stored for future years?**

Yes. Information you provide in this year's annual return will be stored in CIW's systems. This means some information will be pre-populated in future annual returns and other notifications, reducing the amount of data entry you need to do over time.

### **8.4 How will CIW check whether I have published my annual return?**

CIW intends to dip sample providers websites. Annual returns will also be checked as part of our pre-inspection planning and analysis.

## **9. Help and support**

### **9.1 Where can I find guidance on completing and publishing my annual return?**

Further information and guidance on completing your annual return is available on the CIW website at [Annual return | Care Inspectorate Wales](https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return) (<https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return>).

### **9.2 Who can I contact if I have questions?**

Contact CIW by email at [ciw@gov.wales](mailto:ciw@gov.wales) (<mailto:ciw@gov.wales>) or by phone on 0300 7900 126.



This document was downloaded from [careinspectorate.wales](https://www.careinspectorate.wales)

Go to <https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return-2026-frequently-asked-questions> for the latest version.

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