

Annual return 2026: Guidance for providers

Guidance for service providers on completing, submitting and publishing an annual return.

Published: 19 March 2026 Last updated: 19 March 2026

This document was downloaded from [careinspectorate.wales](https://www.careinspectorate.wales)
Go to <https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return-2026-guidance-providers> for the latest version.
This document may not be fully accessible. For more information refer to our [accessibility statement](#).
This document is also available in [Gymraeg](#).

Contents

└ **Introduction**

└ **What's new for 2026**

└ **Legal context**

└ **Failure to publish an annual return**

└ **The annual return**

└ **Access, submission, and publication of the annual return**

└ **Further advice and guidance**

1. Introduction

1.1 This document offers guidance for service providers on completing, submitting and publishing an annual return (“AR”) as required under **section 10 of the Regulation and Inspection of Social Care (Wales) Act 2016** (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/2/section/10/enacted>) (“the 2016 Act”) (as amended by **section 14 of the Health and Social Care (Wales) Act 2025** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2025/1/section/14>)).

1.2 This guidance is for service providers who operate services regulated under the 2016 Act. These include:

- care home services
- secure accommodation services
- residential family centre services
- domiciliary support services
- regulated adoption services
- regulated fostering services
- adult placement services
- regulated advocacy services
- special school residential services

2. What's new for 2026

2.1 There are two important changes to the annual return this year.

2.2 You must now publish your annual return on your own website. This is a new legal requirement. You must do this by 30 June 2026. See **Publishing your annual return (paragraphs 6.10 - 6.15)** for full details.

2.3 The annual return includes new workforce questions. From 2026, CIW and Social Care Wales are combining their data collection. While the form is a little longer this year due to the addition of workforce questions, we have worked hard to streamline the process and reduce the burden on providers wherever possible. See **paragraph 5.4** for full details.

3. Legal context

3.1 The 2016 Act requires registered service providers to submit an AR following the end of each financial year. The AR must include the information set out in **section 10 of the 2016 Act** (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/2/section/10/enacted>).

3.2 The AR must also include the information set out in the **Regulated Services (Annual Returns) Wales Regulations 2017** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2017/1097/contents>) (“the Regulations”), as amended.

3.3 From 1 April 2026, the 2025 Act requires registered service providers to publish the AR on their own website and to make copies of the AR available on request.

3.4 The Regulations also require the AR to be in the form of an online return and be submitted to the Welsh Ministers within 56 days of the end of the financial year to which it relates (i.e. 26 May).

4. Failure to publish an annual return

4.1 Under **section 48(a) of the 2016 Act** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/2/section/48/enacted>), it is an offence for a service provider to fail to submit an annual return within the timescales set out by the Regulations. If a service provider fails to submit an annual return within the required timescales, they could be subject to a penalty notice or other **enforcement action** (<https://careinspectorate.wales/providing-a-care-service/how-we-enforce>) deemed appropriate by Care Inspectorate Wales (CIW).

4.2 Under **section 14(3) of the 2025 Act** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/asc/2025/1/section/14>) it is an offence not to publish an AR within the prescribed time limit.

4.3 Under **section 52 of the 2016 Act** (<https://www.legislation.gov.uk/anaw/2016/2/section/52>), the Welsh Ministers may impose a penalty notice if they are satisfied the service provider has committed a prescribed offence. This includes a failure to submit or publish an AR.

4.4 **The Regulated Services (Penalty Notices) (Wales) Regulations 2019** (<http://www.legislation.gov.uk/wsi/2019/887/contents/made>) (as amended), sets out the penalty to be paid is an amount corresponding to level 4 on the standard scale (this is equivalent to £2,500).

5. The annual return

5.1 The AR will include questions about the service provider. There will also be questions about each of the regulated services operated by the service provider.

5.2 The questions will consist of four types of information:

- Information required by the service provider (and the regulated services they operate) as defined by the 2016 Act and the Regulations.
- Information which CIW requires to inform its regulatory functions, such as in relation to food hygiene, etc.
- Information pertaining to the service provider's registration. This will enable CIW to systematically check the provider's registration data on an annual basis to ensure it remains accurate.
- Social Care Wales workforce information to map the size, structure, and characteristics of the sector.

5.3 From 2026 the annual return will include a new, unified data collection process, undertaken in collaboration with Social Care Wales. This revised approach streamlines reporting for organisations, who can now complete a single annual return rather than submit two separate data collections as was previously the case.

5.4 Social Care Wales collects workforce data to map the size, structure, and characteristics of the sector. This information informs strategic planning, enhances service quality, and supports the development of evidence-based policy. Workforce data also enables the identification of recruitment and retention trends, helps in understanding the needs of the workforce, and ensures improved outcomes for individuals using care and support services.

5.5 The AR should reflect the position of the service provider and the regulated services it operates as at the 31 March of that financial year. The online AR will be prepopulated (where possible) with the information CIW holds about the service provider and the services they operate. The service provider will be required to check the information is up to date and indicate accordingly. Where the information needs to change, the service provider will be prompted to submit the relevant online profile update, notification or variation. **It is the responsibility of the service provider to ensure the information held by CIW on the legal register is accurate and up to date.**

5.6 The online AR has been designed so that whoever accesses it on behalf of the regulated service will only see the sections relevant to them. Introductory text and help text have also been provided to help explain what is needed in each section.

5.7 The majority of the AR will require the input of numerical data entries, i.e. numbers of full-time staff, etc. However, some areas will require the input of free text. Whoever is completing the AR will be able to navigate through the online system 'saving as you go'.

5.8 Before completing the AR, it will help providers to have the following information to hand for each service:

- A copy of the latest **Quality of Care Review** (<https://www.careinspectorate.wales/sites/default/files/2026-02/RISCA%20Guidance%20on%20completing%20the%20quality%20of%20care%20report>)
- Copies of any Responsible Individual (“RI”) visit reports
- The latest Statement of Purpose for each service

5.9 CIW and Social Care Wales are combining their data collection processes. By completing and submitting your AR, your data will be shared with both organisations.

Provider section of the annual return (AR)

5.10 The service provider section of the AR will be largely prepopulated by information held by CIW. The service provider will need to review this information and indicate if it is accurate.

5.11 The service provider will also be required to complete two questions about the arrangements in place during the relevant reporting period for identifying, planning and meeting training needs of staff employed and the arrangements for the recruitment and retention of staff.

Service section of the annual return (AR)

5.12 The service provider will need to provide information about each of the services it is currently registered to provide.

5.13 Some of the service section information contained within the AR will be prepopulated by information held by CIW. The service provider will need to review this information and indicate if it is accurate.

5.14 A proportion of the service level information required for the AR will need to be inputted by the service provider.

5.15 The AR includes a statement of compliance for each service operated by the service provider. This sets out how a service is meeting the requirements as to the standards of care and support set out within the relevant service regulations.

5.16 The RI is required to ensure the section of the AR relating to the service they are designated for has been completed. The RI will be required to provide a declaration confirming they have read and agree with the information contained in the AR relating to their service.

5.17 If there is no designated RI in place or the RI is expected to be absent for more than 28 days, the service provider must provide a reason why the RI is unable to sign the declaration. The online system will provide a facility for this.

5.18 Where a service provider operates more than one service (and has designated more than one RI for those services), it is the legal responsibility of the designated RI of the service concerned to sign the declaration of truth for that service. An RI cannot sign the declaration for another service he/she is not designated for.

6. Access, submission, and publication of the annual return

Accessing the annual return (AR)

6.1 Service providers will access and submit their online AR via their CIW Online account. The CIW Online system will provide clear guidance regarding the reporting period for which an Annual Return (AR) is required. The online system will also identify within the AR (for the stated reporting period) the services operated by the provider for which information is required.

6.2 The AR will be accessible from **01 April**, every year.

6.3 RIs and/or organisation officer(s) associated to the provider who have activated their CIW Online account can access, complete, and submit the AR.

6.4 Any appointed online assistants (within a regulated service) can access and complete the information required within the AR for the service they have been appointed for. However, online assistants cannot submit the AR.

6.5 Service providers, RIs and any appointed online assistants (within a regulated service) should check they are able to access their online account before the AR becomes available on the 01 April. This will help avoid any potential delays in completing and submitting the AR.

Submitting the annual return (AR)

6.6 The service provider must ensure all the information within the AR for the relevant reporting period required has been completed. The online system will prevent a service provider from submitting an incomplete AR.

6.7 Under regulation 7 of the Regulated Services (Annual Returns) (Wales) Regulations 2017, it is the responsibility of the service provider to submit the AR. Before an AR can be submitted it must contain a signed declaration by the service provider. The declaration confirms they have read and agree with the information contained within the AR.

6.8 We would expect the service provider to have arrangements in place to agree the content of the AR, such as a meeting, prior to submission. We may request the minutes of such meeting (or other form of audit trail) as evidence the service provider has discussed and agreed the AR.

6.9 The service provider has until **23:59:59** on **26 May** of each year to submit their AR. Any difficulties the service provider has with submitting their AR by the deadline should be raised with us as soon as possible. Once the deadline has passed, the online AR system will close and service providers may no longer be able to submit.

Publishing the annual return (AR)

6.10 CIW will no longer publish the AR as it's the legal responsibility of the service provider to publish the AR.

6.11 Only the information required of the service provider (and the regulated services they operate) as set out in the 2016 Act and the Regulations are contained within the published AR.

6.12 Service providers must ensure their completed AR does not include any personally identifiable information or inflammatory language, prior to submission. Service providers should keep in mind their own legal responsibilities in respect of data protection legislation and the "processing" of personal data.

6.13 Following submission of the annual return, two separate documents will become available in the service provider's CIW Online account.

6.14 The first is a **transaction copy** of the annual return, which is generated immediately after submission. This is a complete record of all information submitted to CIW and is for the service provider's own records only. The transaction copy must not be published on the provider's website. It will be clearly marked to indicate that it is not the version for publication.

6.15 The second is a **publication copy**, which will generate within 30 minutes of submission (see note at paragraph 41). This is a separate document containing only the information required to be made publicly available. Within the annual return, each question is clearly labelled to indicate whether it will be included in the copy for

publication. Service providers must download the copy for publication from their CIW Online account and publish it on their own website by 30 June following the end of the reporting period.

Please note (2026 only): The publication copy functionality will not be available when the annual return window opens on 1 April 2026. Service providers who submit their annual return before early May 2026 should be aware that their publication copy will not be generated immediately. Publication copies will be created automatically once the functionality becomes available. CIW will contact all relevant service providers to confirm that their publication copy is ready to download.

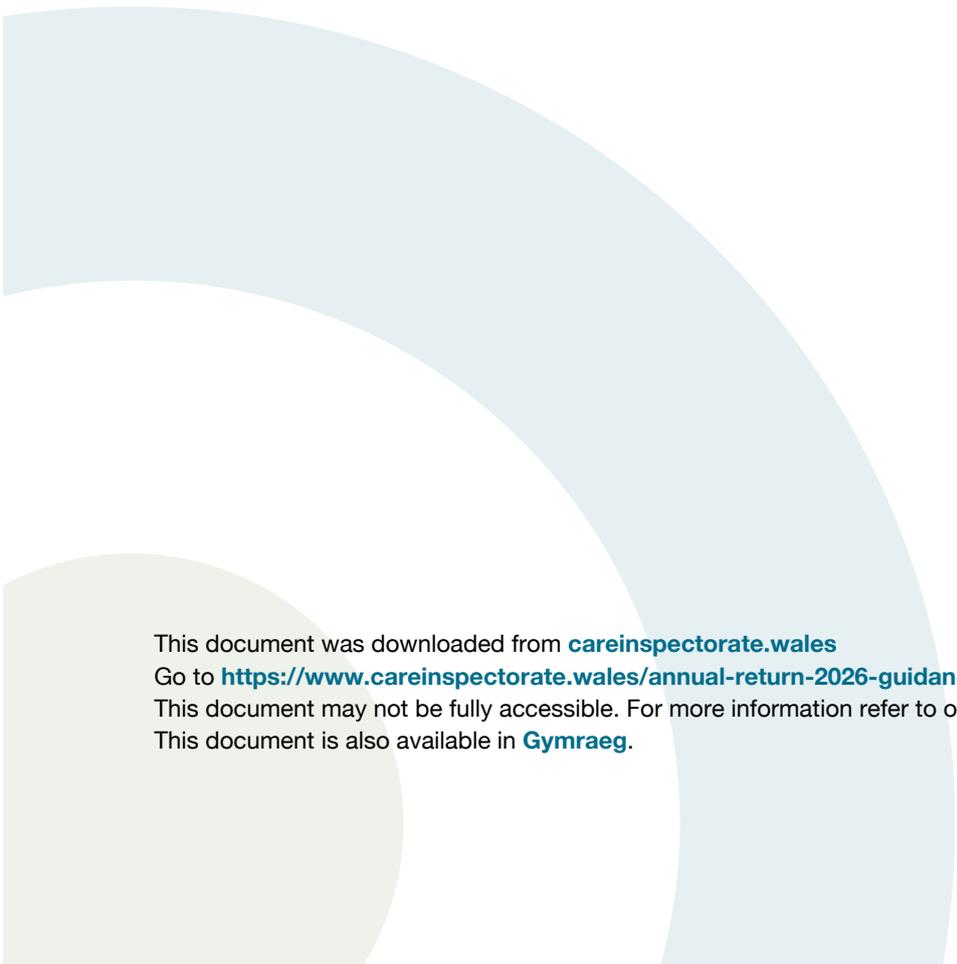
Non-operational services

6.16 All registered services must complete, submit and publish an AR and this includes dormant and non-operational services.

7. Further advice and guidance

7.1 Frequently asked questions are available on the CIW website here: [Annual return 2026: Frequently asked questions \(HTML document\) | Care Inspectorate Wales \(https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return-2026-frequently-asked-questions?_ga=2.200956075.441165968.1773831621-1457996684.1769418691&_gl=1*](https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return-2026-frequently-asked-questions?_ga=2.200956075.441165968.1773831621-1457996684.1769418691&_gl=1*)

7.2 If there are any queries about completing or submitting the AR, the service provider can contact CIW by telephone on 0300 7900 126 and select option 4, or via email: [CIW@gov.wales \(mailto:CIW@gov.wales\)](mailto:CIW@gov.wales). This service is available in both Welsh and English.



This document was downloaded from [careinspectorate.wales](https://www.careinspectorate.wales)
Go to <https://www.careinspectorate.wales/annual-return-2026-guidance-providers> for the latest version.
This document may not be fully accessible. For more information refer to our [accessibility statement](#).
This document is also available in [Gymraeg](#).