



Education & Skills
Funding Agency

Education and Skills Funding Agency
Sanctuary Buildings
Great Smith Street
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www.gov.uk/esfa

13 December 2017

To: Chairs of Trustees, Chief Executives/Accounting Officers and Chief Financial Officers in academy trusts

Dear colleagues,

Change to academy trust compliance with financial returns

This is my first letter to you in my capacity as the Education and Skills Funding Agency's (ESFA) Accounting Officer, a role in which I succeed Peter Lauener. In doing so, I would like to take this opportunity to emphasise the importance of the timely submission of financial returns.

The deadline for submitting your 2016/17 financial statements, as I am sure you are aware, is fast approaching. These are due on **31 December** and should be submitted via the accounts submission coversheet online form. The ESFA has taken considerable steps to modernise the process for submitting returns over the past 12 months, to make it as easy as possible for trusts to submit their accounts in line with the requirements of the Academies Financial Handbook.

It is essential that we receive returns on time in order for the ESFA to maintain its assurance to Parliament through the Sector Annual Report and Accounts (SARA). Missing or late returns have a detrimental impact on the accuracy of reporting and also our ability to provide timely support to trusts with potential financial issues.

As Peter Lauener set out in his letter of November 2017, the timeliness of financial returns has improved over recent years, with 95% of trusts submitting their 2015/16 financial statements by the deadline of 31 December 2016, and we are very grateful for this high level of support. However, in spite of the improved return rates, our data shows there are still a number of trusts who do not comply with return requirements. In the interest of fairness to those trusts who consistently submit returns on time, we are therefore now taking a firmer stance on non-compliance with the submission date set out.

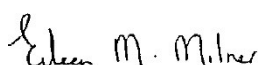
The ESFA is changing its approach to academy trusts' non-compliance with financial returns processes and **will be publishing a list of trusts who are late, or do not submit, two or more of the annual financial returns (listed at Annex 1). The first list, for returns due to be submitted during the 2017/18 academic year, will be published on GOV.UK in**

September 2018. Future lists will be published every September based on the preceding years' returns.

We have taken the decision not to include the first round of reporting of the land and buildings collection tool (submission deadline 31 October 2017) to allow trusts to adapt to the new process. We acknowledge that systems do not always run smoothly, so we have specified the criteria for publication as two or more late returns to allow for exceptional circumstances.

If you have any further questions about this letter then please contact us using our [enquiry form](#). However, let me stress in advance, just how grateful I am for the amount of support that so many of you give to these key processes.

Yours sincerely,



Eileen Milner
Chief Executive, Education and Skills Funding Agency

Annex 1 – remaining return deadlines 2017/18

Remaining returns for 2017/18	Guidance made available	Online form launch date	Deadline for submission
Financial statements, auditor's management letter, accounts submission coversheet online form	13 June 2017 (via Academies Accounts Direction)	6 October 2017	31 December 2017
Accounts return	1 September 2017 (via Academies account return)	1 October 2017	19 January 2018
Budget forecast return outturn	28 February 2018	19 March 2018	18 May 2018
Budget forecast return	1 June 2018	1 June 2018	27 July 2018