

Revised regulatory returns from October - Betting

With the revised regulatory returns coming into effect on 3 October 2011, the Gambling Commission's Director of Strategy, Matthew Hill, says it has taken on board the industry's views on regulatory returns by removing some of the information required and making the process easier.

Background

Betting operators supply a range of information to the Gambling Commission, such as volume and type of bet, gaming machine numbers and key business data like profit and employment figures. Supplying the information – which is a condition of an operating licence – is mostly done online via the regulatory returns process. We use the data to help focus our activity and provide advice to government on issues such as stakes and prizes. We also publish the collated data in the industry statistics, which we hope will become increasingly useful to those who provide the information in the first place.

With nearly four years' experience receiving and analysing the information provided by operators, we took the opportunity to review the arrangements in consultation with stakeholders. We gathered views on the regulatory returns by running a formal consultation, from stakeholder meetings, from the calls we get and from the open events for smaller bookmakers which we held around the country last year. In fact, one of the issues raised during those open events led to us quickly extending the deadline for submitting annual returns at year end from 28 to 42 days.

As a result of that review, which included a great deal of constructive input from the industry, we've removed a number of information requirements and made it easier to fill in the regulatory returns. The revised process takes effect on 3 October 2011. And to further help the industry understand the changes, we have published examples of the new hard copy versions of the returns forms and associated guidance notes at the Commission's website [here](#).

We encourage operators to use the Commission's website to submit regulatory returns, and with many businesses already submitting their returns online it's no surprise the majority of respondents to our consultation supported the move away from paper submissions. However, for the time being we will retain the option to submit the returns on paper, but anyone who requests the paper forms from 1 September will be sent the new versions.

The current system of flexible submission dates is being retained. We think the system should continue to be driven by the operator's own business cycle and not the other way round and a move to fixed submission dates could pose difficulties for some operators.

And in light of the responses from the betting sector, we decided not to implement the proposed trading categories. Instead, the information required on the current return will be retained relating to horses, dogs, football, numbers and 'other'.

What has changed?

Returns for all betting operators will require the gross gambling yield (GGY) – this is the amount retained by operators after the payment of winnings, but before the deduction of the costs of the operation. This will apply across all sectors apart from lotteries, so collecting GGY information will enable us to compare this across the whole industry.

In response to feedback, we have removed the requirement for providing information on the number of full time equivalent – FTE – staff on workforce information, and instead only the total number of staff employed per activity, regardless of the number of hours worked, will be needed. Although this means we won't be able to distinguish the number of people employed on a part-time basis by the industry, we think this is outweighed by reducing the burden of operators having to provide this information.

The information required for recording under age access has resulted in some confusion, so in line with suggestions from the industry, we have changed the way information about access to premises by those under age is asked for and reported. To clarify the requirement here, we want operators to record the number of occasions when, after entering their premises, a person was unable to verify their age when challenged.

We have also changed the requirements for recording gambling by those who are under 18 (under 16 for lotteries), while the distinction between access to premises and attempts to gamble will remain, as these are treated separately by the Gambling Act.

The section on research, education and treatment (RET) of problem gambling has been reworked to make it easier for operators to complete and for the Commission to analyse. Where an operator provides multiple activities, RET contributions must be made for each activity and the appropriate return for the area of business being reported should reflect this.

We are also asking for the number of active, inactive, new or disposed of premises. While we do receive some premises information from local authorities, it is important for us to be able to cross-check this information, given its importance. Premises information is vital to help us plan operational activity, to understand the industry landscape and in fulfilling our advisory role.

We should just remind operators that the gambling regulatory framework places the onus for securing the licensing objectives with them. As part of our compliance programme, operators may often be asked to provide evidence that demonstrates how they know that the policies and procedures they have put in place to secure the licensing objectives are effective. This may include, as appropriate, information that is not collected through regulatory returns, so in practice the data required for the regulatory returns is likely to be a subset of the data needed for operational purposes.

Finally, a reminder also that online submissions are the preferred route for regulatory returns, with the revised process from 3 October incorporating a comprehensive new on-screen help system. The guidance notes on completing paper regulatory returns have also been amended and improved to help operators.

You can see the details of the consultation carried out between August - November 2010 and the Commission's response, on the website [here](#).