

IPG+ Update

9 April 2020

Communicating with us Online and By Email	<p>The Rural Payments service is available and this should be used wherever possible.</p> <p>Where there is no option to use Rural Payments or customers are unable to access the online service, there are currently two options.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none">• Customers can email us at ruralpayments@defra.gov.uk where the guidance confirms there is an existing email service. We recommend to use this route.• If there is no existing email service and customers would normally post something to us, they should continue to use the post for now as this service is still operating.• If customers are unable to reach the post, they should keep hold of their documents and we will provide information shortly on what they need to do.
Signatures	<p>Where the person with the correct permissions is not able to sign any forms, due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) related issues, this can be done by someone else and a note advising us of this is clearly shown either on the front of the document or next to the signature box.</p> <p>We will verify the signature before making any payments.</p>
BPS, CS and ES and legacy Woodland Schemes 15 May Deadline	<p>We are grateful for your views regards the 15 May deadline. Whilst these are being considered the message to your members remains that applicants and claimants for BPS, CS, ES and legacy woodland schemes should continue to get their claims in to us for the 15 May, and we would appreciate it if where possible you encourage your members to aim to complete the forms earlier.</p> <p>We are still considering proposals as regards the period in which applications can be changed without penalty following 15 May.</p>
RLE1 Forms	<p>The Rural Payments service can be used to transfer land that is already registered or land can be added by email.</p>

	<p>Wherever possible please transfer entitlements online rather than use an RLE1 form.</p> <p>We had previously recommended customers to keep hold of non-urgent paper RLE1 forms until we issued further instructions.</p> <p>Following further consideration and given that our document handling service is still operating we now advise customers to continue to use the postal service to submit any documents to us.</p> <p>Where customers are unable to reach the post office they should keep hold of their RLE1 form and we will provide information shortly on what they need to do.</p>
CS Higher Tier	<p>The window for requests for Higher Tier packs closed on 31 March, however we have been as flexible as possible with this date and exceptionally accepted requests for packs up until midnight on 8 April, where customers have been impacted by Coronavirus (COVID-19).</p> <p>We did not extend the deadline as we had already received good levels of interest.</p> <p>We received a total of 1,024 pack requests, including around 73 packs after 31 March.</p> <p>The Forestry Commission and Natural England have reviewed the packs that have been requested and confirmed that this is in line with what local advisers and woodland officers expected i.e. – where advisers have been out and / or woodland officers were aware of potential HT applications.</p> <p>We are still proposing to close the window on 1 May, but will ensure that we support customers and agents who are impacted by Coronavirus (COVID-19), please alert us to any difficulties they have with meeting the deadline.</p> <p>If customers are impacted – can you please ask your members to contact the RPA’s CSC.</p> <p>We will endeavour to make NE Advisers and FC Woodland Officers available to provide technical advice on applications.</p> <p>We are looking at other ways in which we can continue to provide support and advice on Higher Tier applications (and on SSSI approvals) over this period remotely.</p>

<p>CS – Hedgerows and Boundaries Grant</p>	<p>Again, application numbers are looking healthy and we are still proposing to close the window on 1 May, but will ensure that we support customers and agents who are impacted by Coronavirus (COVID-19).</p> <p>Please advise your members to contact our CSC to alert us to any difficulties they have with meeting the deadline as a result of Coronavirus (COVID-19).</p> <p>We can confirm we will accept paper-based forms for Hedgerows and Boundaries applications.</p>
<p>CS Mid Tier</p>	<p>Mid Tier applications are also in line with what we are anticipating.</p> <p>We are tracking and monitoring this daily to see if this changes due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) and will continue to keep the closing date of 31 May for paper requests, the 30 June for online pack requests and the window for final submission of applications of 31 July under review.</p> <p>We are also looking at other ways in which we can provide support and advice remotely on Mid Tier applications and on Catchment Sensitive Farming advice over this period.</p>
<p>Organic certification</p>	<p>We understand that organic certification bodies are making arrangements to continue to issue certification and conversion documentation where they are unable to make site visits.</p> <p>We will accept all such documentation where it is necessary to support processing of BPS and CS applications, and CS and ES claims.</p>
<p>Countryside Stewardship capital claims:</p>	<p>If customers have problems collecting all the evidence for their capital claims due to Coronavirus (COVID-19) illness or restrictions, they should do all they can to submit their claim, making it clear that their evidence is missing due to Coronavirus (COVID-19).</p> <p>They should continue to collect the evidence as soon as they are able to do so, and keep hold of it as we'll ask for it at a later date.</p>
<p>Farming Recovery Fund</p>	<p>Please see updated information about how to apply for a grant from the Gov.uk. Farming Recovery Fund.</p>
<p>Countryside Productivity Small</p>	<p>The deadline for submitting claims has been extended by 2 months to 31 July 2020.</p> <p>If customers have yet to submit their claim, we have emailed them about this change.</p>

grant scheme – round 2	They should submit their claim as soon as they are able to do so.
Facilitation Fund	Where Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions are preventing facilitators from meeting we have held a question and answer session this week and have asked facilitators to share with us their plans so we can look at the various options we have to support.
Drop in centres position	In the current circumstances drop in centres will not be available this year for handing in any correspondence and supporting documents.
Bridging payments	We are still exploring options around bridging payments for CS and ES agreement holders yet to receive a payment and will come back to you as soon as we are able.
Inspections	<p>The Commission has published a draft regulation looking at reducing inspection levels to varying levels – from 5% to 3% for the majority of BPS and Pillar 2 claims, and from 1% to 0.5% for cross compliance.</p> <p>They have also said we can use alternative evidence (such as geo-tagged photographs and remote sensing) where inspections are not practical in the current climate.</p> <p>These proposals are quite helpful and we would expect to make use of them, and as noted above, we are looking at further ways in which we can streamline wider checks.</p>
Force Majeure	<p>Where Coronavirus (COVID-19) restrictions are preventing existing CS/ES customers implementing their agreement in full, we are looking at options around use of force majeure, exceptional circumstances and minor and temporary adjustments.</p> <p>We will come back to you with further thoughts in the coming weeks.</p> <p>Force Majeure arrangements also continue to be in place for BPS customers.</p>