

Key Message

Entry Level Stewardship and Uplands Entry Level Stewardship budgets have not been reduced and remain open to farmers as before.

HLS remains open for business. Natural England welcomes new applications for agreements which would now 'go live' in the next financial year.

Customer FAQs

Q. What is the implication of CSR on ELS/UELS?

A. Entry Level Stewardship and Uplands Entry Level Stewardship budgets have not been reduced and remain open to farmers as before.

Q. What is the implication of the CSR on HLS?

A. HLS will continue to grow under the current programme year on year. There may be fewer agreements than originally anticipated. But, through the more effective targeting of HLS agreements to the delivery of our key outcomes, we hope to keep the reduction in the expected number of HLS agreements to a minimum. The HLS budget for this year will be reduced, although we do not yet know the figure. Given the high volume of applications already received, they are likely to exceed any revised budget for the current financial year. That means that the earliest start date we expect to be able to offer for new HLS agreements is 1 April 2011. This will not affect applications that have already reached the stage of formal offer of an agreement, but it will affect applications that are being worked on at the moment.

Q. Will the CSR affect the type of environmental and societal benefits delivered by HLS?

A. We will continue to look closely at all proposed agreements to make sure that within each agreement we have focused resources on our key outcomes. We will continue to offer HLS agreements that provide the maximum environmental outcomes and value for money.

Q. What does this mean to my HLS application if Natural England has already agreed that I can commission a FEP but I have not yet had my agreement confirmed?

A. We generally expect that applications that are underway will still go ahead, but they may have the start date deferred until April 2011. The impact of the spending review will not affect whether we offer an agreement for a current application but it might affect how generous the offer is. But as normal, we expect that some applications that go through the FEP process may not become live agreements. This might be because the farmer does not in the event want to pursue the particular

management options we seek or, more rarely, because the FEP reveals that the environmental assets we expected to find are not actually there. This process will not be changed by the spending review: it is something we already do and will continue to do.

Q. What does this mean if I am thinking of applying for an HLS Agreement?

A. Natural England will continue to seek applications, just as before, for HLS agreements that provide the maximum environmental outcomes and value for money. We are still open for business for agreements that will start from April 2011 and we will continue to work proactively with partners and stakeholders to identify the farm holdings with the best environmental potential for new HLS agreements. Just as before the spending review, you should contact Natural England before you commission a FEP (Farm Environment Plan)

Q. When will I know what the implication of the CSR announcement is going to be on my HLS application?

A. Your Natural England Adviser will contact you shortly to let you know what the implication of the announcement is going to be on your particular application. This will include the new likely start date.

Q. Will I be able to add additional capital work items to my existing agreement?

A. The temporary suspension of further approvals extends to the addition of capital work items to existing Higher Level Scheme (HLS), Countryside Stewardship Scheme (CSS) or Environmental Sensitive Areas (ESA) agreements for spend in the financial year 2011/12 (1st April 2011 – 31 March 2012).

Q. What will the impact of the reduced HLS budget be on commercial agents and advisers?

A. The fact we will be funding a reduced number of HLS Agreements this year than we originally anticipated will inevitably mean that there will be fewer Farm Environment Plans (FEPs) being commissioned.

Q. When will NE know what the agri-environment budget allocations are for this year and the remainder of programme period up to 2013?

A. We are waiting to receive the details of the final settlement but we would hope to have confirmation of the budget shortly.

Q. What does this mean for Classic Scheme Agreement Holders?

A. Classic agreement holders who offer agreements of most environmental value and value for money will certainly be eligible for an HLS agreement, but just as currently, we cannot guarantee that every classic agreement will automatically meet these standards.

Q. What if I'm retrofitting UELS in to my existing HLS agreement?

A. This instruction applies to offers of new HLS agreements. It does not apply to live HLS agreements that are re-started to retro-fit UELS. The re-starts can be continued as before, provided that the total HLS agreement value for the 2011/12 FY is not increased.

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