

English Woodland Grant Scheme

Operations Note 7

1st April 2009

FC England Grant Budget Management Policy

Purpose This note explains the rules FC England (FCE) employ to ensure grant budgets are managed effectively and transparently. The principles apply to all FC England grants including closed schemes such as Woodland Grant Scheme

Introduction In recent years the increased demand and uptake of forestry grants in England has resulted in FCE developing principles to ensure the budget is not over committed; this first started in 2000 with the introduction of claim years

The principles employed try to be as simple and transparent as possible, so potential applicants can easily understand whether funds are still available and if so, what can be applied for

The principles of the budget management policy are divided into 3 main sections:

Budget allocation – how FCE sets budgets for each grant in each region

First come first served grants – to ensure the budget is committed in a methodical, fair way

Rescheduling – how requests to change planting or claim year will be considered

The principles set out in this policy apply to all grants unless otherwise stated in other literature specific to particular grants

Summary FCE employs strict claim year control in order to manage its budgets effectively and fairly

It is the responsibility of the contract holder to ensure work is completed and claimed in the approved claim year. FCE will not send reminders to applicants

Budget Allocations for Future Years Detailed allocation and grant specific rules are set out in the main body of this Operations Note, but some headline points are:

Grants will not be allocated more than 5 claim years ahead of application except Farm Woodland Payment, and in some circumstances shorter periods may be allocated

FCE intend to commit funds one year ahead of the application year ahead e.g. by March 2009, all grant funds for 2009/2010 claim year will already be fully committed via approved contracts

A single application can't take up more than 50% of the regional budget for each grant

First Come First Served Is based on date of receipt of a complete application

Applications cannot be submitted before grant windows open

Time taken by FCE to process an application won't count against the applicant

An earlier application will lose its place if it subsequently proves to be incomplete or unacceptable

Rescheduling The best guarantee of receiving grant is to apply early, carry out and claim the work in the approved claim year (and planting year where relevant)

Decisions to accept rescheduling requests are ultimately at FCE's discretion, but we will meet reasonable requests wherever possible

Agreed payments that are rescheduled into future years have a direct impact on the funding that can then be made available for new applications

The sooner the request to change a payment year is made the greater the chance that the request can be accepted

Budget Allocation

National and Regional prospectuses for the English Woodland Grant Scheme (EWGS) are published every year. Each prospectus shows:
FC England targets

The amount of money already committed

How the remaining money will be committed

Any transitional arrangements

FCE provides an indication of current budget availability for each region. This is published on the FC EWGS website along with the regional prospectuses. Potential applicants should check the website or contact their local FC conservancy office to avoid the possibility of applying for a grant, which is already fully committed

The intention is to commit funds one-year ahead e.g. by March 2008, all grant funds for 2008/2009 claim year will already be fully committed via approved contracts, plus a proportion of grant funds for later years. In Spring each year we will open for applications for the next claim year e.g. in Spring 2008 we are open for 2009/2010 applications and beyond

Aims of the Budget Allocation Policy

To ensure budget allocations and availability are transparent to applicants

To ensure budgets are fully but not over committed

To ensure complete commitment of funds prior to the start of that claim year

To ensure sufficient headroom is kept available for future claim years

To ensure budgets are reasonably shared between applications

To ensure the allocation rules reflect the type of grant and reality of forestry circumstances

Principles

We will not approve proposals for claim years beyond 5 years from application e.g. Until March 2009 we can accept proposals up to 2013/2014. The only exception to this is Farm Woodland Payments

Normally we expect the majority of grants to be proposed for the first 1-2 years, tailing off into years 3-5 for consolidation work rather than new work starting

We will accept applications until the deadline for applications is reached or budgets are fully subscribed, whichever is sooner

A single application can't take up more than 50% of the regional budget for each grant

We will not issue letters to contract holders reminding them of the need to adhere to claim years. It is the responsibility of the contract holder to ensure work is completed and grant claimed in the correct claim year

Grant Specific Allocation Rules

- Woodland Creation Grant – applications should include some planting in the first planting season and cannot extend beyond 2nd

claim year e.g. 2008 applications should include work in the 2008/2009 planting season and the latest claim year is 2010/2011

- Woodland Management Grant – applications will be for 1st instalment in October of the following claim year, and 4 equal instalments thereafter
- Woodland Planning Grant – must apply for the following claim year, no later
- Woodland Assessment Grant - must apply for the following claim year, no later
- Woodland Regeneration Grant – cannot apply more than 2 claim years ahead e.g. applications between April 2008 and March 2009 can only include work for claim years 2009/2010 and 2010/2011
- Woodland Improvement Grant SSSI – main work must be in year 1 or 2; consolidation work if required can be agreed for the following 3 years
- Other Woodland Improvement Grants – main capital work must be in year 1 or 2, consolidation work if required can be agreed for years 3-5

The table below shows how the above allocation principles would apply to each grant budget. The claim years shown (2008/2009 etc) are there as an example

	Current Claim year (0)	1	2	3	4	5
	2008/2009	2009/2010	2010/2011	2011/2012	2012/2013	2013/2014
WCG*	Fully committed	100%	50%	20%	0	0
WMG	Fully committed	100%				
WPG	Fully committed	100%	0	0	0	0
WAG	Fully committed	100%	0	0	0	0
WRG**	Fully committed	100%	50%	0	0	0
WIGs	Fully committed	100%	50%	30%	20%	10%

* As Planting Years overlap claim years, it means there is the potential to receive grant support for 4 planting seasons over 3 claim years, depending on budget availability. We would normally expect the third year only to be necessary for large scale schemes or those requiring long lead in times e.g. industrial land restoration

** As Planting Years overlap claim years, it means there is the potential to receive grant support for 3 planting seasons over 2 claim years, depending on budget availability.

First Come First Served

The aims of the first come first served policy are to provide a fair and efficient means of dealing with applications within the budget available, for grants where no challenge, judging or scoring system is in operation

Principles

Date of receipt of a complete application (i.e. completed EWGS forms and acceptable map) from post or Grant & Licences Online Service is the operative date, or “date received”

An earlier application will not be ‘overtaken’ by an later one if both prove to be 'acceptable' applications (i.e. time taken by FCE to process scheme won't count against an applicant)

An earlier application will lose out to a later one if the earlier one subsequently proves to be incomplete or unacceptable

Rescheduling

Contract holders may, for various reasons, need to change the agreed work or the agreed Claim Year. If so, agreement holders must agree the change in planting year (for new planting) and/or the Claim Year with us beforehand. Amendment requests to reschedule payments (if accepted) have a direct effect on the budget available for other applications in those future years

FCE will try to meet reasonable demands to reschedule work within the principles set out below, but must still ensure a credible budget is available for new applications

You will be asked for details on the reason why there is a need for rescheduling and an indication on the likelihood that the work will be undertaken if rescheduled

Aims of the Policy

To meet amendment requests to reschedule work where it is well justified

To ensure sufficient budget is set aside to meet the needs of new applications

To make the decision-making process transparent

To ensure any rescheduling is consistent with core targets FCE has to meet

Principles

The following principles will be used to help determine which rescheduling requests will be accepted:

Any decision to accept or reject a rescheduling request to change a Planting Year or Claim Year is entirely at FCE’s discretion. If a request is not accepted applicants will need to carry out the work as agreed, or submit a new application. If you choose to submit a new application, note that there may be different eligibility criteria and payment rates

FCE will only accept rescheduling requests for work approved in the current or a future claim year. Work that has missed it’s claim year cannot be rescheduled

FCE will normally only accept one rescheduling request per contract per year

FCE will only reschedule agreed payments up to two Claim Years ahead e.g. payments agreed for Claim Year 2008/2009 cannot be rescheduled beyond claim year 2010/2011

Requests to change an agreed Planting Year by one season must have a sound justification and there must be sufficient budget available in the requested Claim Year (if claim year change is also required). Requests to change Planting Year by more than one season will only be accepted in exceptional circumstances

FCE will not accept amendment requests to reschedule payments for work that no longer meets FC targets or where there is no budget available. For example, requests to reschedule WGS WIG 2 (which is now closed) payments into Claim Year 2008/2009 will not be accepted if it is not currently an FCE funding priority (i.e. there is no grant of equivalent purpose currently available under EWGS)

FCE may only accept requests to reschedule work and payments at certain periods each year for certain grants. This is to allow seasonal and financial considerations to be properly taken into account Deadlines will be published on the FC England website and distributed to forestry organisations such as the Forestry and Timber Association, the Forestry Contracting Association and Institute of Chartered Foresters

To ensure rescheduling activity does not unduly reduce the budget for new applications FC set limits on the total amount of rescheduling change that can be accommodated by any one Claim Year. The value of rescheduled payments allocated to any one Claim Year will not normally exceed 20% of the uncommitted funds available (as published in the regional prospectuses). This limit may be varied by region and type of grant, so you are advised to contact your local office to see if the rescheduling budget has already been committed

Requests to change agreements will be accepted on a first come first served basis, until the request deadline passes or until the rescheduling budget limit has been reached, whichever comes first

Where significant funds are involved, FCE may on occasion write to individual or groups of agreement holders where work has not yet been claimed. The applicant will be advised of the options available for that particular contract, including rescheduling where possible. It is important to note that scheme holders should not rely on being contacted; the responsibility for complying with the agreed planting or claim year remains with the scheme holder

Regional Variations The policy described in this Operations Note sets out the national position. To reflect regional circumstances, some of the rules may be adapted accordingly, and these are detailed in Annex A of this note

Further Advice The EWGS website www.forestry.gov.uk/ewgs contains all the information needed to apply for grant support. If you do not have access to the internet, you can request any of the information from your local Forestry Commission office

We recommend getting professional advice on woodland management and grants. A list of national and regional professional organisations is available at www.forestry.gov.uk/england-advice or from your local FC office

Versions

- Version 1.0 issued November 2005 as the FC England Rescheduling Policy
- Version 2.0 issued September 2006 as FC England Grant Budget Management Policy
- Version 2.1 issued 1st June 2008 – minor changes and new header
- Version 3.0 issued 1st April 2009 – changed budget commitment profile to increase future commitment; regional budget management variances removed