

Application assessment

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Initial assessment

Once an application is received by the due deadline it will be assigned to a case officer from RPID or NatureScot to assess against the Scheme requirements.

Eligibility checks

The case officer will carry out the following checks:

- general eligibility checks which are listed here: [AECS Application Eligibility Questions \(PDF, Size: 73.4 kB\)](#)
- checks that the application meets the eligibility requirements for the individual options and capital items selected
- checks that all the required [supporting documents \(PDF, Size: 42.4 kB\)](#) have been submitted on time and are fit for purpose

If an application does not meet the eligibility requirements, and if this cannot be remedied, the application will be rejected. A [review](#) of the decision can be requested.

Discussion with applicant / site visit

The case officer will arrange a discussion with the applicant, and this may also include a site visit. Case officers must be satisfied by the end of the visit / discussion that the applicant has a full understanding of the option requirements and how the plan will fit with their current land management (for example, stock exclusion dates versus forage requirements).

By 'applicant', we mean any individuals responsible for delivery of the contract. This could be, for example, the farmer/crofter, the farm manager or the estate factor. It is unlikely that an agent completing the application is going to be the individual responsible for day-to-day management of the contract.

Any previous non-compliance with AECS contracts will be checked and we will wish to discuss and address any issues with the applicant to ensure this isn't repeated.

If a site visit takes place, the applicant will be invited to enter comments and sign the site visit report. The signature is recognition that the applicant was present at the site visit and the comments are an accurate record of what was discussed. If a site visit is not undertaken and a discussion is held by telephone, the case officer will record a brief description of the main points discussed. An electronic copy of these comments can be made available to the applicant on request.

Types of acceptable amendment

Only small changes to a submitted application can be made by the case officer at the assessment stage; for example:

- correction of Land Parcel Identifiers (LPIDs). For example, where a hedge is proposed between two fields and the wrong LPID is used
- correcting typographic or arithmetical errors
- transposition errors, for example mixing up numbers like 3, for 8 or 5

We cannot accept removal of ineligible options or changing the location of options just because the applicant has not fully understood what was being applied for. For example, removing a field from the wader grazed grassland option because insufficient land has been left clear for grazing livestock or changing a field from one management option to another.

We cannot accept the wholesale change of the plan or significant amendments. If significant changes are required, the application will be deemed not up to standard and will be rejected.

We therefore strongly advise you to consult with RPID or NatureScot before submitting your application, if you have any queries; for example, about land eligibility for particular options.

Scoring

Case officers will calculate the score(s) for each case, using the [Scoring Criteria](#) .

There are separate scoring criteria for each of the following:

Agri-environment, Organics, Irrigation Lagoons.

Final assessment

An approving officer in RPID or NatureScot will recommend approval, part approval or rejection of the application.

In some cases, the approving officer will refer the application to the National Project Assessment Committee (NPAC) for consideration (the NPAC is an expert panel constituted on a national basis). This will happen for the following types of cases:

- higher value applications above an agreed monetary value for the application round
- any other applications which require a decision on a point of principle or value for money issue before the final decision to approve or reject is reached

Once all applications are assessed fully and scored, budgetary restrictions may result in some eligible applications being approved while others are part approved or rejected.

Notification of decision

Applicants will be notified of the decisions reached and (where applicable) be provided with the reasons why an application is part approved or rejected. Successful applicants will receive a contract offer as explained in the [Contracts guidance](#) .

Reviews

If an applicant is not satisfied with our decision about their application, they may wish to ask us to undertake a [formal review](#) .

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