

# Scoring criteria and clearing process

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## Introduction

The following guidance explains how we will assess Forestry Grant Scheme applications use scoring criteria and the clearing process.

## Scoring criteria

All forestry applications will be assessed by Forestry Commission Scotland using option specific scoring criteria.

Forestry Commission Scotland will use the information provided in your application and will score each option based upon how well it meets the scoring criteria. The option specific scoring criteria guidance explains which criteria will be applied and how your application will be scored.

Each option within your application must meet the threshold score to be considered for approval. Woodland creation applications must score a minimum of one point against each scoring criteria except for additional benefit. The score will then be used as the basis for allocating funding on a competitive basis through the Forestry Grant Scheme clearing process.

### **Scoring criteria**

- Delivery of option benefits (up to 5 points)

Delivering specified benefits that are relevant to the option in question.

- Scale of delivery (up to 5 points)

Assessing the scale at which an activity is being proposed and how well that delivers the objectives for the option.

- Delivering better quality (up to 5 points)

Recognising applications that deliver a greater contribution to Scottish Government objectives by improving on the minimum standards/eligibility requirements for the activities described, or referred to, in the option guidance.

- Delivery of good practice (up to 5 points)

Assessing the methods and work practices you employ when these help to reduce potential adverse impacts to the environment.

- Value for money (up to 10 points)

For Woodland Creation options, we will assess the value for money that your application offers.

### **Supplementary point**

- Additional benefit ( 1 point)

Recognising the delivery of other specified benefits that have not already been considered within the scoring criteria.

## **Clearing process and budget management**

The aim of the Forestry Grant Scheme clearing process is to ensure that contracts are awarded on a competitive basis and that the highest quality projects are supported from the available budget.

In line with Scottish Government policy and Scottish Rural Development Programme priorities, the annual Forestry Grant Scheme budget will be divided between a series of budget categories. The budget categories and the Forestry Grant Scheme grant options they include are shown in the document below.

The clearing process will then involve applications being compared against the uncommitted budget (headroom) available in the relevant budget category. Forestry Commission Scotland will highlight the availability of grant funds using a traffic light system of green, amber and red as indicated in the document.

For most grant types this will be on a monthly basis, but for some it will be on an annual basis as indicated in the document. The frequency of clearing rounds may be varied in the future, in response to application volumes or the availability of funding.



[Budget categories \(PDF, Size: 265.8 kB\)](https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Clearing-and-budget-categories-with-threshold-scores-Oct-2016.pdf)

doc\_external\_url: <https://www.ruralpayments.org/media/resources/Clearing-and-budget-categories-with-threshold-scores-Oct-2016.pdf> Forestry Grant Scheme: clearing and budget categories with threshold scores [October 2016]

### **Stages in the clearing process**

1. At the start of each calendar year and in advance of the first annual clearing exercise in April a threshold score will be set for each grant clearing category. The threshold scores will be published together with an indication of the available headroom. The headroom available will be communicated using a traffic light system and will be updated throughout the financial year.
2. Applicants will then be able to prepare their applications and take decisions about the applications based on budget position and the threshold score at that time.
3. When applications are submitted conservancy staff may examine cases to establish whether or not a case is likely to meet the relevant threshold score. If an application would not meet the threshold score it will be rejected.
4. All Forestry Grant Scheme cases that meet the threshold score will go forward to the clearing process after the assessment stage has been completed, the case score has been entered into the IT system and the assessment approved by a senior manager.
5. National office staff will run a report within the IT system to produce a list of cases ready for clearing against each of the Forestry Grant Scheme budget categories.
6. The list of cases within each category will be compared to the available funds or headroom in each budget category.
7. A clearing score will be set for each category so that cases are funded as per the clearing business rules set out in the budget categories document. The clearing score may be above the threshold score, depending upon the level of competition.

8. Where the value of cases exceeds the available budget for a category the clearing score will be set at a level where all the cases at or above the threshold score can be funded in line with the business rules in the budget categories document.

9. Cases scoring at or above the clearing score within each budget category will generally be approved. Cases scoring below the clearing score will generally be rejected.

10. Where a number of cases share the same score and the available budget isn't sufficient to fund them all, situations may arise where it is necessary for the clearing score to split a group of cases with the same score. Where this arises the budget will be allocated on a first-come first-served basis, based on the date the application was submitted. Cases will be approved in the date order they were received, until the available budget has been fully committed.

11. Alternatively, for options with an annual clearing round, we may use a judging panel format to verify scores and assist with decisions on the allocation of funding.

12. The clearing score from each clearing round will be entered into the IT system and the status of each case included in the clearing will be updated to show approved, rejected or partial approval.

13. Exceptionally, Forestry Commission Scotland's national office may withdraw cases from the clearing round and refer it back to the conservancy where, for example, an anomaly is found with the case, such as the Sustainable Management of Forests element of a joint Sustainable Management of Forests / Woodland Improvement Grant case is rejected and the Woodland Improvement Grant element has a high enough score to be approved, but wouldn't then be eligible.

14. Forestry Commission Scotland may from time to time review the budget allocation across clearing categories, where for example the pressure in some categories is much higher than others, or to reflect changes in policy priorities. Where this happens Forestry Commission Scotland would publicise the revised budgets and headroom.

### Complex Forestry Grant Scheme cases

Applicants may submit Forestry Grant Scheme cases that include multiple grant options. Where this happens each separate option will be scored and will be considered in its own right as part of the clearing process for the relevant grant category. Where some options are approved and others rejected, the case will be given a partial approval, covering the options that met or exceeded the threshold score in their budget category.

In the case of woodland creation, projects will often include two or more woodland creation options, used together to create a more robust and diverse woodland. In such cases, where the different options are all part of a single woodland creation project/block that couldn't reasonably be divided up, we would adopt the following approach to treat them as a single project for clearing:

- each option will be scored separately and must meet the threshold score
- the woodland officer will then review the scores for the different options and calculate a single score by deriving the median score using the Forestry Grant Scheme score sheet
- the options will then be considered as one project through the clearing process

Generally applicants are advised against submitting cases that include multiple options with a mix of monthly and national clearing rounds. Where such cases are submitted they will either need to wait until both clearing processes are taking place together or one of the options would need to be rejected.

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