

News story: Extension of Countryside Stewardship payment claim deadline

The Countryside Stewardship (CS) claim deadline is being extended by one month to 15 June 2018. This means CS agreement holders have an extra month to submit their CS annual claim. The original deadline for Natural England to receive these by was 15 May 2018.

The claim deadline extension does not apply to Environmental Stewardship claims or Basic Payment Scheme 2018 applications; both of these must be submitted by 15 May to avoid late claim penalties.

Farmers and land managers who are waiting for their CS agreement offer will be notified soon about whether or not their application was successful. Natural England is working to send out the remaining agreement offers by the end of May, and successful candidates will need to accept their agreements and send in a claim by 15 June.

Natural England is writing to all Countryside Stewardship agreement holders and applicants awaiting their agreement to inform them of the one month extension. The extra month also means that customers who need to make any changes to the maps on their agreement offer or raise any other queries with Natural England have time to do so.

Press release: Minister for Europe statement on election of new Armenian Prime Minister

Minister for Europe, Sir Alan Duncan said:

I am pleased that a solution to the political situation in Armenia has been found, via negotiation and through the Parliament, and congratulate Nikol Pashinyan on his election as Armenia's new Prime Minister.

It is to the credit of all involved that events over the last three weeks have unfolded peacefully and largely without incident.

It is important that the restraint and statesmanship shown by all parties continues and that the political process moves forward, based on solid constitutional and legal foundations.

In my two visits to Armenia in the last 12 months, I have seen first-hand the country's rich history, and its huge potential. I was particularly impressed by the many young people I met, who are determined to build a bright future for Armenia.

The UK, as a longstanding friend of Armenia, stands ready to support its efforts to strengthen its democracy, deliver good governance, and improve economic opportunities for all.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Sir Alan Duncan on Twitter [@AlanDuncanMP](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on [Instagram](#), [YouTube](#) and [LinkedIn](#)

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[Government response: Ministerial statement on the peace process in South Sudan](#)

Minister for Africa Harriett Baldwin said:

The UK welcomes the resumption of peace talks in South Sudan next week and the consultations that are now underway. This is a critical moment for the peace process and we remain strongly in support of regional efforts to bring about a lasting peace.

It is disappointing that we once again find ourselves in a position where the cessation of hostilities agreement reached at the last set of talks has not held, and the talks have so far failed to generate serious commitment to compromise. Meanwhile, the people of South Sudan remain in a terrible state of conflict and humanitarian crisis. Fighting, troop movements and the rhetoric of war continues, pushing the country deeper into crisis. In recent weeks we have seen violent clashes surge in Unity, Jonglei and the Central Equatorias. This is causing immense suffering and preventing lifesaving assistance from reaching those most in need.

As no party has yet been held to account for violating the cessation of hostilities agreement, the perpetrators continue to act with impunity. This is undermining prospects for a lasting peace to be agreed at the upcoming talks. Those who have violated the Cessation of Hostilities Agreement must face consequences for their actions. We urge the Intergovernmental Authority on Development (IGAD) to take immediate action in this regard, to leave the parties in no doubt of the region's commitment to peace.

Only a negotiated agreement can bring peace in South Sudan and create the conditions for elections. We believe that the High-level Revitalisation Forum remains the only platform with the scope and inclusion to deliver this.

Further information

- Follow Foreign Office Minister Harriett Baldwin on Twitter [@hbaldwin](#)
- Follow the Foreign Office on Twitter [@foreignoffice](#) and [Facebook](#)
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News story: Jeremy Hunt orders urgent action on patient safety at independent hospitals

Independent hospitals must 'get their house in order and improve safety', the Health and Social Care Secretary Jeremy Hunt has said.

In a letter to the chief executives of independent healthcare providers, Jeremy Hunt ordered urgent action to be taken to improve patient safety.

As part of its recent report on the sector, the Care Quality Commission (CQC) – the safety regulator – raised patient safety as its biggest concern. CQC rated a third of independent hospitals as 'requires improvement' following examples of poor practice and unsafe care.

The Health and Social Care Secretary said:

If the sector is to partner with the NHS and benefit from our world-leading medical training, we need urgent assurances that the independent sector will get its house in order on safety, as well as a commitment to take rapid action to match the NHS's world-recognised progress on transparency.

Mr Hunt has given the sector 2 weeks to respond and set out what action they will take.

[Read the full text of the letter.](#)

Press release: PM appoints new Deputy Chair of Security Vetting Appeals Panel

The Prime Minister has approved the appointment of Sir Antony Edwards-Stuart as the new Deputy Chair of the Security Vetting Appeals Panel, with effect from 1 April 2018. He will replace Sir Stephen Silber who is retiring from the Panel after several years of service.

Sir Antony Edwards-Stuart was called to the Bar (G) in 1976, took Silk in 1991 and elected a Bencher in 2009. He was appointed an Assistant Recorder in 1991, a Recorder in 1997, a Deputy High Court Judge in 2003 and a Judge of

the High Court (Queen's Bench) in 2009. He was appointed a Judge by Request of the Upper Tribunal (Administrative Appeals and Immigration and Asylum Chambers) in 2011. He was appointed a Legal Member of the Special Immigration and Appeals Commission and a Judge in Charge, Technology and Construction Court, in 2013. Sir Antony retired from the High Court in November 2016 and has, since, taken up appointments as party appointed arbitrator or chairman in several international arbitrations.