

World's first International Plant Health Conference to set global agenda on biosecurity and address challenges in plant health

The world's leading authorities on plant health and biosecurity will come together for the world's first ever International Plant Health Conference (IPHC), co-organised by the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations, the Secretariat of the International Plant Protection Convention (IPPC) and Defra.

More than 500 policymakers, academics and experts from over 74 countries will convene at the Queen Elizabeth II Conference Centre in London to address current and future plant health challenges, including the impacts of climate change, food security, environmental protection, facilitating safe trade, and new pest and disease pathways, such as e-commerce. Held on 21-23 September, delegates will share knowledge and discuss global scientific, technical and regulatory issues, alongside actions to tackle these existential threats to our society, economy and environment.

The [Food and Agriculture Organization \(FAO\)](#) of the [United Nations](#) estimates that each year up to 40 percent of global crop production is lost to plant diseases, costing the agricultural trade over USD 220 billion, whilst invasive insects cause losses of at least USD 70 billion. The risks to food security, international trade, biodiversity and our precious natural environment as a result of current and future outbreaks are all too real. Strengthening global standards of biosecurity, applying the IPPC and international plant health standards, as well as fostering greater international collaboration and raising public awareness and engagement with these challenges will be paramount to safeguard the global economy and environment for generations to come.

Nicola Spence, United Kingdom Chief Plant Health Officer, said:

Plant health and biosecurity are fundamental to life on Earth. Plants provide 80 percent of the food we eat and 98 percent of the oxygen we breathe. In a changing climate, ensuring their continued health and vitality will be critical to safeguarding food security, safe international trade and a thriving natural environment for future generations.

The United Kingdom upholds amongst the highest standards of biosecurity in Europe but there is much more to do to secure our future resilience – here and around the world. I look forward to coming together with international experts from a range of disciplines to discuss how to tackle the varied and mounting

challenges facing our precious plant life.

Jingyuan Xia, Director of Plant Production and Protection Division said:

Climate change and human actions have altered ecosystems and created new niches where plant pests and diseases can thrive. When combatting pests and diseases, farmers should adopt, and policymakers should encourage the use of, environment-friendly methods such as integrated pest management.

Applying international plant health standards helps reduce the use of pesticides and poisonous substances, which kill pollinators, natural pest enemies and organisms crucial for a healthy environment. These result in healthier crops with less residues, leading to better human, plant and animal health.''

Osama El-Lissy, Secretary, International Plant Protection Convention, said:

The first International Plant Health Conference is an important advancement of our work in protecting plants from pests and diseases. We are very pleased to partner with Defra who shares FAO's and IPPC's common goals. We cannot underestimate the impact that plant pests and diseases have on global food security, livelihoods, the environment and economies.

To achieve our goals and contribute to food security, protect the environment and facilitate safe trade, I encourage donors and governments to invest in building plant health capacity, research and outreach. Let us keep our collective efforts going and take bold action to sustain the momentum. When we protect plants, we protect our health and our lives.

Across the three days of the IPHC, plenary sessions will explore a range of scientific, regulatory and technical issues, including:

- Regional perspectives on tackling ongoing pest and disease outbreaks, including *Xylella fastidiosa*, fall armyworm and coconut rhinoceros beetle.
- How to increase the use of electronic phytosanitary certificates to make trade safer, faster and cheaper.
- The development and adoption of early warning systems for pests and diseases to increase vigilance and preparedness for future outbreaks.

Moreover, the IPHC aims to promote positive behavioural change through greater public engagement with biosecurity issues. For example, the

importance of not bringing home plants, trees, fruit and seeds from overseas, as doing so could inadvertently cause pests, diseases and invasive species to be introduced or to spread in new areas. This aligns with the United Kingdom Government's long-running 'Don't Risk It!' campaign, which featured on the Animal and Plant Health Agency's Gold Medal-winning stand at the RHS Chelsea Flower Show 2022.

Protecting plant health is critical in achieving the United Nations Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Healthy plants contribute to achieving food security for all (SDG 2 Zero Hunger) and promotes responsible food consumption and production (SDG 12). Protecting plants helps protect biodiversity and the environment from the impact of plant pests (SDG 13 and 15), and facilitates safe trade, in turn providing decent work and boosting economic growth (SDG 8). The International Plant Health Conference supports the delivery of the [IPPC Strategic Framework 2020-2030](#).

For more information, visit the [International Plant Health Conference website](#).

[Funding boost for protection systems for the British Army](#)

Press release

The Defence Science and Technology Laboratory (Dstl) confirms new investment that will increase scalable protection options for the UK's armoured land vehicles



New investment will exploit and build on the MIPS standard to demonstrate a modular, flexible Active Protection System

Funded by the British Army, the investment of £15 million over three years will enable Dstl to deliver the follow-on phase of the successful Icarus

Technology Demonstrator Programme ([TDP](#)). The Icarus TDP, through Chief Scientific Advisor (CSA) funding, developed and demonstrated the Modular Integrated Protection System (MIPS) Open Architecture Standard (the MIPS standard) to Technology Readiness Level 5 (TRL 5).

This new investment will exploit and build on the MIPS standard to demonstrate a modular, flexible Active Protection System (APS) at high maturity (TRL 7).

The next stage of MIPS will enable the UK to continue to develop future capabilities, with advances through to 2040 to include:

- Improved sensors – multi-spectral devices are combined with increasingly sophisticated fast signal processing
- Improved information processing – including data fusion and artificial intelligence (AI)
- Improved effectors – current counter-munition and directed energy technology projects deliver precise effects to defeat a wider range of threats
- Improved high-speed directors – compact and affordable energy storage and motor drive technologies
- Improvements in electronic infrastructure component technologies – exploiting safety and security features being developed elsewhere for industrial robotic and autonomous systems

Minister for Defence Procurement, Alec Shelbrooke said:

“Our Armed Forces keep us safe around the clock and it’s incumbent upon us to do all we can to protect them and adapt to future threats.

“The war in Ukraine has highlighted the importance of well protected armoured vehicles. We are supporting the Army to modernise and remain at the forefront of cutting-edge capabilities.

“This is an important step forward in researching the latest technology to improve protection for armoured vehicles, helping them prevent and repel attacks from the ground and air.”

Advanced APS is a critical enabler to achieving operational advantage and is a key function to enable survivability of the Army’s fleet of vehicles. MIPS provides a modular framework to exploit high maturity APS components and/or systems into a sovereign-designed solution that can be procured at pace, be supported through life, and be effectively integrated into mission systems.

The new activity will:

- Exploit previous CSA investment of £10 million into MIPS development
- Be an essential step towards developing an enduring approach for vehicle protection Research and Development (R&D)
- Boost UK industry by securing UK industrial capability in APS. It promotes Land APS activity with Industry as part of the Land Industrial Strategy
- Seek to build a UK industrial partnership in MIPS that increases

exploitation opportunities and enables Army to benefit from the delivered capability options

- Work with a range of industry partners, including the UKACIA group (the UK APS Community of Interest and Action).

Dstl's Active Protection expert Tom Newbery said:

"This is such an exciting opportunity for Dstl and Industry to work together to deliver a step change in vehicle survivability by taking MIPS to the next level of maturity. MIPS has the potential to open up a range of capability options for Army, improving vehicle survivability against the most challenging threats now and in the future."

Published 21 September 2022

SLC delivers more than £1bn in student Maintenance Loan payments

The last two weeks have been unprecedented for many people across the country following the passing of Her Majesty Queen Elizabeth II.

Throughout the period of national mourning, we have continued our essential work, ensuring Maintenance Loan payments are being made to students as they start university or college. We have paid £1bn of Maintenance Loan funding to students since the beginning of September*, with payments continuing over the coming weeks as the academic year gets underway.

We were scheduled to make our largest payment of the first term on Monday (19 September). However, due to the Bank Holiday and the historic events taking place, we brought this forward, making more than 300,000 payments, to the value of £655m, last Friday (16 September). In some cases, students had yet to enrol or their confirmation of attendance had not been received from their university or college, so haven't yet received their funding. Further payments will be made today and over the coming weeks as we receive information from the education providers.

We remain on track to increase the number of students we have processed and ready to pay by term start – enabling them to invest in their futures through access to higher and further education.

It will come as no surprise that September remains our busiest time and this is reflected in the high demand for our contact services, with lots of customers wanting to speak to us. To help students get quick access to the information they need, we have added a 'common questions' area to their online accounts. Students are advised to check here for answers to their

questions first, instead of contacting us, to avoid having to wait to speak to an advisor.

We understand that many students will be looking forward to starting the new term and will be keen to know what stage their payment is at. The good news is that they can also check this easily via their online accounts. This is by far the fastest way for students to get an update on their payment's progress – Watch our short film below to find out more.

[payment status film](#)

Similarly, students can use their accounts to update details, such as their bank account information or term time address or to submit any outstanding evidence they have been asked for.

In addition, we have made a wide range of information available [online](#) that students can access at any time to help them with their questions about payment or student finance more generally.

As we get closer to term start, there may still be students who are only applying now and may have questions about when they will get their funding. The message to eligible students in this position is not to worry! While it can take six to eight weeks to process an application, our team will do their best to make sure they have some funding in place as soon as possible, by awarding the minimum Maintenance Loan first, followed by a top-up payment if they are entitled to more funding. [Find out more about applying late online.](#)

Throughout the rest of the month, we will make the remainder of Maintenance Loan payments to students before switching our attention to paying Tuition Fees to Higher Education Providers on their behalf.

To those who are starting university or college over the next couple of weeks, I'd like to wish you the best of luck from the team here at SLC and we look forward to supporting you as you progress through your studies.

*Please note these are provisional figures. Full year figures are published in our Student Support for Higher Education statistical release which will be published on 24 November.

[**PM meeting with President Gitanas Nauseda: 20 September 2022**](#)

Press release

Prime Minister Liz Truss met the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nauseda, at the UN General Assembly in New York.



The Prime Minister met the President of Lithuania, Gitanas Nauseda, at the UN General Assembly in New York today.

The leaders agreed on the value of the UK-Lithuania defence relationship and welcomed our close cooperation through NATO and the Joint Expeditionary Force.

They underscored the importance of likeminded countries working together to counter malign threats, increase our energy independence and end economic coercion by authoritarian states.

The Prime Minister stressed the UK's support for Lithuania in its ongoing trade dispute with China.

The Prime Minister and President Nauseda welcomed the recent news of gains by the Ukrainian Armed Forces. These demonstrate, once again, that Ukraine's counter-offensive can succeed with proper international – economic and military – support.

Published 21 September 2022

[Regulator of Social Housing to introduce tenant satisfaction measures from 1 April 2023](#)

Press release

The new TSMs will enable tenants to scrutinise their landlord's performance and give landlords insight about where they can improve



Today (21 September 2022) the Regulator of Social Housing published the outcome of its consultation on tenant satisfaction measures. As a result, from 1 April 2023 all registered providers of social housing will need to collect and publish a range of comparable information on areas such as repairs, safety checks and complaints.

The new TSMs will enable tenants to scrutinise their landlord's performance, give landlords insight about where they can improve, and provide a source of intelligence to RSH about whether landlords are meeting regulatory standards. They are part of the regulator's wider programme of work to develop proactive consumer regulation of the social housing sector, following the introduction of draft legislation in Parliament earlier this year.

The TSM consultation received over 1,000 responses, including around 600 from social housing tenants. The majority of respondents across the sector supported the TSM proposals and considered that the measures would provide rounded information about landlord performance in the sector. RSH has refined the TSMs following feedback to improve some of the measures and increase the transparency they will provide about landlords' performance.

Alongside its decisions RSH has published the technical requirements providers will need to follow on the management information and tenant perception surveys. These requirements aim to strike a balance between ensuring consistency between providers and allowing flexibility to maximise tenant participation in surveys and ensure the measures are deliverable across the wide range of social housing providers.

The new requirements apply to both housing associations and local authorities and will come into force through the new Tenant Satisfaction Measures Standard. All registered providers will need to collect TSM data. Landlords with more than 1,000 homes will have to submit their data to RSH every year. In response to consultation feedback, RSH will carry out a voluntary data submission pilot with smaller providers.

Fiona MacGregor, Chief Executive of RSH, said:

The launch of TSMs is an important step in the move to proactive consumer regulation. The new measures will provide a valuable source of data to help ensure social housing landlords provide safe homes of a decent standard and a quality service to tenants.

Local authorities and housing associations now need to make sure they have the systems and processes in place to start collecting data from April 2023.

Notes to editors

1. The complete suite of Tenant Satisfaction Measures documents published as an outcome to the consultation is available on the [TSM consultation page](#).
2. The Tenant Satisfaction Measures consultation was launched on 9 December 2021 and closed on 3 March 2022.
3. The Regulator of Social Housing promotes a viable, efficient and well-governed social housing sector able to deliver homes that meet a range of needs. It does this by undertaking robust economic regulation focusing on governance, financial viability and value for money that maintains lender confidence and protects the taxpayer. It also sets consumer standards and may take action if these standards are breached and there is a significant risk of serious detriment to tenants or potential tenants.

Published 21 September 2022