

# [BHC Nicosia DynamicUK series: the scientific response of the UK and the FCDO to COVID-19](#)

World news story

An insightful talk with Professor Carole Mundell, Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) at the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office (FCDO) as part of the DynamicUK series.



The FCDO's CSA elaborates on the UK's support to scientific initiatives

A vaccine solution is what can help us return to a normal way of living, Professor Carole Mundell stresses in an online discussion presented by the British High Commission Nicosia.

In this fifth webinar of the #DynamicUK series, the British High Commission presents an insightful discussion with the Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office's (FCDO) Chief Scientific Adviser (CSA) on how the COVID-19 pandemic has affected the FCDO's work.

Professor Mundell discusses with her colleague Myrtani Pieri, Assistant Professor at the Department of Life and Health Sciences in the University of Nicosia, about the scientific response of the UK and the FCDO. She makes specific reference to COVAX, and on supporting science initiatives such as UK on genomics on viral samples. She also tackles the challenges of developing a vaccine for the coronavirus and how COVAX acts as a mechanism for all countries, especially the poorest ones, to have equitable access to vaccines.

We want to get back to a mobile globally connected world, we want to get back to the normal lives we had, we want to be able to go out, see our friends and family, socialise, work in the way we did in the past; and we can't do that until the world is safe, until this vaccine solution is the thing that will help us go back to a normal way of living.

Throughout this thoughtful discussion, the FCDO's CSA paints a very elaborate picture of the situation and the progress of vaccines and how politicians are trying to manage the situation and the distribution of knowledge in order to create a unified solution.

Commenting on the rising challenges, Professor Mundell states:

The COVID crisis has really highlighted that our politicians are desperate for solutions, because they want to run their countries, they want to have successful and thriving economies and they want to have healthy populations. And of course, they turn to science to do that; there's lots of challenges, not just in the lab, not just in the clinical trials but right through to our logistics-worldwide in fact. We need to come together as nations to show that we can deliver the full chain of the vaccine right to our patients.

Discover more and gain insights on climate change and the needed recovery, by watching the entire webinar in the video below. [#DynamicUK Online Discussion Series – Prof. Carole Mundell](#)

Check out our social media channels for more exciting discussions!

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## [Strengthening our health protection at the border](#)

Mr Speaker, with permission, I'd like to make a statement on new measures to keep this country safe from coronavirus.

Thanks to our collective efforts, we're turning a corner.

Cases of coronavirus have fallen 47% in the last 2 weeks, and they're falling in all parts of the UK.

But we're not there yet. Hospitalisations are falling, but there are still many more people in hospital than at the April or November peaks, and the number of deaths, whilst falling, is still far too high.

Our vaccination programme is growing every day.

We've now protected over 12.2 million people – almost 1 in 4 adults in the United Kingdom, including:

- 91.4% of people aged 80 and above
- 95.9% of those aged between 75 and 79
- 77.2% of those aged between 70 and 74, who were the most recent group to have been invited

And we've also vaccinated 93.5% of eligible care home residents.

We've made such progress in protecting the most vulnerable that we're now asking people who live in England, who are aged 70 and over, and haven't yet had an appointment to come forward and contact the NHS.

And you can do that by going online to NHS.UK or dialling 119, contacting your local GP practice.

So we can make sure that we reach the remaining people in these groups even as we expand the offer of a vaccine to younger ages.

Mr Speaker, these are huge steps forward for us all.

And we must protect this hard-fought progress, by making sure we stay vigilant and secure the nation against new variants of coronavirus that put at the risk the great advances we've made.

## **New variants**

Mr Speaker, coronavirus, just like flu and all other viruses, mutates over time.

And so responding to new variants as soon as they arise is mission-critical to protect ourselves for the long term.

We've already built firm foundations.

Like our genomic sequencing, which allows us to identify new variants, our testing capacity, which allows us to bring in enhanced testing whenever and wherever we find a new variant of concern, and our work to secure vaccines that can be quickly adapted as new strains are identified.

Our strategy to tackle new variants has 4 parts.

First, the lower the case numbers here, the fewer new variants we get.

So the work to lower case numbers domestically is crucial.

Second, as I set out to the House last week, is enhanced contact tracing, surge testing and genomic sequencing.

We are putting this in place wherever a new variant is found in the community – like in Bristol, Liverpool and, as of today, Manchester.

Third, is the work on vaccines to tackle variants, as set out yesterday by Professor Van-Tam.

And fourth, health protection at the border to increase our security against new variants of concern arriving from abroad.

## **Borders**

Mr Speaker, I'd like to set out to the House the new system of health measures at the border that will come into force on Monday.

The new measures build on the tough action that we've already taken.

It is of course illegal to travel abroad without a legally permitted reason to do so. So it's illegal to travel abroad for holidays and other leisure purposes.

For the minority who are travelling for exceptional purposes, they will be subject to a specific compliance regime and end-to-end checks throughout the journey here.

Every passenger must demonstrate a negative test result 72 hours before they travel to the UK.

And every passenger must quarantine for 10 days.

Arriving in this country involves a 2-week process for all.

We've already banned travellers altogether from the 33 most concerning countries on our red list, where the risk of a new variant is greatest, unless they're resident here. But even with these tough measures in place, we must strengthen our defences yet further.

I appreciate what a significant challenge this is.

We've been working to get this right, across government, and with airport operators, passenger carriers and operational partners, including Border Force and the police.

I want to thank them all for their work so far.

And we've been taking advice from our Australian colleagues, both at ministerial level and from their leading authorities on quarantine.

The message is: everyone has a part to play in making our borders safe.

I know this is a very difficult time for both airlines and ports, and I'm grateful to them for working so closely with us.

You have such an important role to play in protecting this country and putting in place a system so that we can securely restart travel when the time is right.

The whole team at the borders working together.

Mr Speaker, let me set out the 3 elements of the strengthened end-to-end

system for international arrivals coming into force on 15 February.

This new system is for England.

And we're working on similarly tough schemes with the devolved administrations.

And working with the Irish Government to put in place a system that works across the Common Travel Area.

The 3 parts are as follows. Hotel quarantine, testing and enforcement.

## **Hotel quarantine**

First, Mr Speaker, we're setting up a new system of hotel quarantine for UK and Irish residents who've been in red list countries in the last 10 days.

In short, this means that any returning residents from these countries will have to quarantine in an assigned hotel room for 10 days from the time of arrival.

Before they travel, they will have to book, through an online platform, and pay for a quarantine package, costing £1,750 for an individual travelling alone, which includes the hotel, transport and testing.

This booking system will go live on Thursday, when we will also publish the full detailed guidance.

Passengers will only be able to enter the UK through a small number of ports that currently account for the vast majority of passenger arrivals.

When they arrive, they'll be escorted to a designated hotel, which will be closed to guests who aren't quarantining, for 10 days or for longer if they test positive for COVID-19 during their stay.

We've contracted 16 hotels, for an initial 4,600 rooms, and we will secure more as they are needed.

People will need to remain in their rooms, and of course will not be allowed to mix with other guests.

And there will be visible security in place to ensure compliance, alongside necessary support – so even as we protect public health, we can look after the people in our care.

## **Testing**

Second, Mr Speaker, we're strengthening testing.

All passengers are already required to take a pre-departure test, and cannot travel to this country if it is positive.

From Monday, all international arrivals, whether under home quarantine or

hotel quarantine, will be required by law to take further PCR tests on day 2 and day 8 of that quarantine.

Passengers will have to book these tests through our online portal before they travel.

Anyone planning to travel to the UK, from Monday, needs to book these tests.

The online portal will go live on Thursday.

If either of these post-arrival tests comes back positive, they'll have to quarantine for a further 10 days from the date of the test, and will of course be offered any NHS treatment that is necessary.

Any positive result will automatically undergo genomic sequencing to confirm whether they have a variant of concern.

Under home quarantining, the existing Test to Release scheme, which my right Honourable Friend, the Transport Secretary has built so effectively, can still be used from day 5, but this would be in addition to the mandatory 2 tests.

The combination of enhanced testing and sequencing has been a powerful weapon throughout this pandemic.

And we'll be bringing it to bear so we can find positive cases, break the chains of transmission, and prevent new cases, and new variants, from putting us at risk.

## **Enforcement**

Third, we'll be backing this new system with strong enforcement of both home quarantine and hotel quarantine.

People who flout these rules are putting us all at risk.

Passenger carriers will have a duty in law to make sure that passengers have signed up for these new arrangements before they travel, and will be fined if they don't.

And we'll be putting in place tough fines for people who don't comply.

This includes:

- a £1,000 penalty for any international arrival who fails to take a mandatory test
- a £2,000 penalty to any international arrival who fails to take the second mandatory test, as well as automatically extending their quarantine period to 14 days
- and a £5,000 fixed penalty notice, rising to £10,000, for arrivals who fail to quarantine in a designated hotel

We're also coming down hard on people who provide false information on the

passenger locator form.

Anyone who lies on a passenger locator form, and tries to conceal that they've been in a country on our red list in the 10 days before arrival here, will face a prison sentence of up to 10 years.

These measures will be put into law this week, and I have been working with the Home Secretary, the Border Force, and the police to make sure more resources are being put into enforcing these measures.

I make no apologies for the strength of these measures.

Because we're dealing with one of the strongest threats to our public health that we've faced as a nation.

I know that most people have been doing their bit, making huge sacrifices as part of the national effort.

And these new enforcement powers will make sure their hard work and sacrifice isn't undermined by a minority who don't want to follow the rules.

## **Conclusion**

Mr Speaker, in short, we are strengthening our health protection at the border in 3 crucial ways:

- hotel quarantine for UK and Irish residents who have visited a red list country in the past 10 days, and home quarantine for all passengers from any other country
- a 3-test regime for all arrivals
- and firm enforcement of pre-departure tests and the passenger locator form

Our fight against this virus has many fronts.

And just as we're attacking this virus through our vaccination programme, which is protecting more people each day, we're buttressing our defences through these vital measures so we can protect the progress that we've worked together so hard to accomplish.

I commend this statement to the House.

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## **[New review into use of health data for research and analysis](#)**

A new review, launched by the government today, will focus on the more

efficient and safe use of health data for research and analysis for the benefit of patients and the healthcare sector.

The review will complement the forthcoming Data Strategy for Health and Social Care which will set the direction for the use of data in a post-pandemic healthcare system.

The Secretary of State for Health and Social Care has asked Dr Ben Goldacre to undertake this rapid review and report his findings in April.

Matt Hancock, Secretary of State for Health and Social Care, said:

The pandemic has demonstrated just how important health data is. Ensuring that researchers have secure, transparent and ethical access to health data has the potential to transform health and care and save lives.

Ben has a wealth of experience in working with health data and I am delighted he has accepted my invitation to undertake this review. I am looking forward to working with Ben and seeing his recommendations over the coming months.

Dr Ben Goldacre, Director of the DataLab, Nuffield Department of Primary Care Health Sciences, University of Oxford, said:

The UK has a phenomenal resource in its raw data, and its people. Our challenge is now in the final lap: we need to find safe, secure, collaborative and efficient ways to turn that raw data into insights and action, to improve patient care for all. There is a wealth of expertise around the country, much of it untapped.

I'm excited to talk to people across health, social care and research about their experiences and concerns to help drive better, broader, safe use of health data.

If you would like to get in touch about the review or share your experience of using health data for research, please contact [goldacrereview@dhsc.gov.uk](mailto:goldacrereview@dhsc.gov.uk).

## **Terms of reference for the review**

1. How do we facilitate access to NHS data by researchers, commissioners, and innovators, while preserving patient privacy?
2. What types of technical platforms, trusted research environments, and data flows are the most efficient, and safe, for which common analytic tasks?
3. How do we overcome the technical and cultural barriers to achieving this goal, and how can they be rapidly overcome?
4. Where (with appropriate sensitivity) have current approaches been successful, and where have they struggled?

5. How do we avoid unhelpful monopolies being asserted over data access for analysis?
6. What are the right responsibilities and expectations on open and transparent sharing of data and code for arm's length bodies, clinicians, researchers, research funders, electronic health records and other software vendors, providers of medical services, and innovators? And how do we ensure these are met?
7. How can we best incentivise and resource practically useful data science by the public and private sectors? What roles must the state perform, and which are best delivered through a mixed economy? How can we ensure true delivery is rewarded?
8. How significantly do the issues of data quality, completeness, and harmonisation across the system affect the range of research uses of the data available from health and social care? Given the current quality issues, what research is the UK optimally placed to support now, and what changes would be needed to optimise our position in the next 3 years?
9. If data is made available for secondary research, for example to a company developing new treatments, then how can we prove to patients that privacy is preserved, beyond simple reassurance?
10. How can data curation best be delivered, cost effectively, to meet these researchers' needs? We will ensure alignment with Science Research and Evidence (SRE) research priorities and Office for Life Sciences (OLS) (including the data curation programme bid).
11. What can we take from the successes and best practice in data science, commercial, and open source software development communities?
12. How do we help the NHS to analyse and use data routinely to improve quality, safety and efficiency?

## **Dr Ben Goldacre Biography**

Ben Goldacre is a doctor, researcher and author. He runs the DataLab at the University of Oxford, building tools and services from large health datasets, and advises government on better uses of data and technology.

He leads various technology projects including:

- [OpenSAFELY.org](https://www.opensafely.org/), a new model of secure analytics platform that runs across unprecedented volumes of linked primary and secondary care electronic health record data
- [OpenPrescribing.net](https://www.openprescribing.net/), an open data explorer for NHS primary care prescribing with over 130,000 users a year
- [TrialsTracker.net](https://www.trials-tracker.net/), an open tool that monitors clinical trial reporting performance

His books, including 'Bad Science', have sold over 700,000 copies in more than 30 countries. His online lectures have over 5 million views.

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# Natural England unveils plans for final stretch of coast path in Suffolk

Proposals for improved public access to a 39-mile (62km) stretch of coast between Bawdsey and Aldeburgh have been unveiled today, Wednesday 3 February 2021, by Natural England.

When established, this fifth and final stretch of the path will complete a 138-mile (222km) coastal route along the Suffolk coast. It will run from the Essex/Suffolk border near Manningtree to the Suffolk/Norfolk border at Hopton-on-Sea. Extending around the Alde and Ore estuary, it includes 3 rivers: the Ore, Butley and Alde.

There is now a period of 8 weeks for the public to have their say on the England Coast Path proposals. If approved, this route will become part of the England Coast Path – the 2,700 mile long distance walking route and England's newest National Trail currently being developed around the entire English coast by Natural England.

The estuaries in southern Suffolk define the character of this part of the county, and the proposed route sits entirely within the Suffolk Coast and Heaths Area of Outstanding Natural Beauty. It is also an important area for wildlife.

This stretch of the England Coast Path uses parts of the existing Suffolk Coast Path, and starts at the mouth of the northern side of the Deben.

Along the way it takes in Bawdsey's military history and Shingle Street, then goes around the Butley River estuary with views of Orford Ness. A few miles on, it passes Snape Maltings, then across the marshes in to Aldeburgh.

From cliffs to grassed banks, this stretch has some interesting sites in view. These include the Radar Museum and Martello Towers at Bawdsey, Orford Castle and the old military buildings on Orford Ness. Snape Maltings is also an internationally famous venue for music and the performing arts.

Walkers can enjoy remote beauty spots along the route, such as Boyton Marshes

Hannah Thacker, Natural England's Area Manager for Suffolk, said:

We have had discussions with landowners and key organisations along the proposed route. Their input has been essential and helped shape the proposals. We thank everyone for their time and input so far.

Over the next 8 weeks, we are inviting all organisations, farmers, local residents, visitors and businesses to have their say. It's important that all responses are taken into account and we look

forward to hearing people's views.

Councillor Andrew Reid, Suffolk County Council's Cabinet Member for Highways, Transport and Rural Affairs, said:

I am very pleased that Natural England is publishing the final report, which is the last piece to reveal the route that the England Coastal Path will take in Suffolk.

This is a very exciting time for all those who love the Suffolk coastline and enjoy the peace and solitude it provides. We very much look forward to continuing to work with Natural England and launching Suffolk's first fully fledged national trail.

Anyone may make representations to Natural England about the reports during the 8 week period. Owners and occupiers of affected land may make objections about the reports on specified grounds, which will be considered by a Planning Inspector before the Secretary of State makes a final decision.

All representations and objections must be received by Natural England no later than midnight on 31 March 2021. The full reports, and all the forms and guidance on how to make a representation or objection within the next 8 weeks, are also available on [GOV.UK](https://www.gov.uk).

## **England Coast Path**

The Marine and Coastal Access Act 2009 places a duty on the Secretary of State and Natural England to secure a long distance walking trail around the open coast of England, together with public access rights to a wider area of land along the way for people to enjoy.

Natural England is working on the entire coastal route, with new sections also opened in Cumbria, Norfolk, Dorset, Kent, Somerset, Yorkshire, Northumberland, North Tyneside, South Tyneside, the Tees Valley and Lincolnshire.

- [A map shows a timetable for the work.](#)
- The England Coast Path will be our longest, newest and most challenging National Trail, passing through some of our finest countryside and coastal locations.
- It will secure legal rights of public access for the first time to typical coastal land including foreshore, beaches, dunes and cliffs.

As well as recommending new sections of route, the proposals outline improvements to existing access to the coastline, with proposals:

- To identify a clear and continuous way-marked walking route along this part of the coast, bringing some sections of the existing coastal footpath closer to the sea and linking some places together for the first time.

- To allow the route to 'roll back' if the coastline erodes or slips, solving the long-standing difficulties of maintaining a continuous route along the coast.

## **Further information – Bawdsey to Aldeburgh coast path**

The Radar Museum helps explain Bawdsey's key role in developing radar technology. The cliffs soon give way to the grassed banks that protect much of this coast from the sea. Three Martello towers along this stretch defended the coast from a different threat.

The remote hamlet of Shingle Street was once the home of river pilots. Here the route leaves the open coast to continue alongside the rivers that partly flow parallel to the sea because of Orford Ness.

A route around the Butley River has been proposed but the part-time ferry has been operating for hundreds of years and now relies on volunteers to row people across the river.

Along this stretch there will be glimpses of the strange buildings on Orford Ness that show its military history. All is quiet now and the National Trust is custodian of the area that is a National Nature Reserve, with boat trips from Orford. One of England's most complete keeps at Orford Castle gives good views across to Orford Ness.

Walk a few miles further and the trail passes Snape Maltings that has become an internationally famous venue for music and the performing arts. As well as the concert hall, the Maltings offers shops, places to eat and boat trips along the River Alde.

On the northern bank the route partly follows the Sailors' Path, traditionally a route between Snape and Aldeburgh. The path now crosses Aldeburgh Marshes and gives one last chance to walk alongside the river and see the boats and sailing clubs. There's one last view south to Orford Ness and the final Martello Tower before discovering the delights of Aldeburgh.

## **About Natural England**

Established in 2006, Natural England is the government's independent adviser on the natural environment. Our work is focused on enhancing England's wildlife and landscapes and maximising the benefits they bring to the public.

- We establish and care for England's main wildlife and geological sites, ensuring that over 4,000 National Nature Reserves (NNRs) and Sites of Special Scientific Interest are looked after and improved.
- We work to ensure that England's landscapes are effectively protected, designating England's National Parks and Areas of Outstanding Natural Beauty, and advising widely on their conservation.
- We run green farming schemes that deliver over £400 million a year to farmers and landowners, enabling them to enhance the natural environment across two thirds of England's farmland.
- We fund, manage, and provide scientific expertise for hundreds of

conservation projects each year, improving the prospects for thousands of England's species and habitats.

- We promote access to the wider countryside, helping establish National Trails, including the England Coast Path, and ensuring that the public can enjoy and benefit from them.

For more information, visit [England Coast Path: improving public access to the coast](#).

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## [Improved Countryside Stewardship scheme opens for 2022 agreements](#)

Farmers and land managers are being encouraged to apply for [Countryside Stewardship \(CS\) agreements](#) to help them protect and improve the natural environment, as the new scheme opens today (Tuesday 9 February).

Through CS, farmers can apply for funding to improve their local environment – from restoring wildlife habitats and creating woodlands to managing flood risk. Following close working with industry, changes have been made to the scheme this year to broaden out the options available and make it easier to apply.

CS will eventually be replaced with the new Environmental Land Management scheme and by entering an agreement now, farmers will be best-placed to benefit from the new agricultural policy once it is fully rolled out in 2024.

### **Farming Minister Victoria Prentis said:**

An improving and expanding Countryside Stewardship scheme is a great opportunity to deliver environmental benefits on your land and receive financial incentives for doing so. I strongly encourage farmers to apply for 2022 agreements.

We are guaranteeing that anyone who enters a new Countryside Stewardship agreement will be able to leave early in order to join the Environmental Land Management scheme once fully rolled out in 2024, so there is no reason not to apply today.

Following ongoing work with industry leaders and customer feedback, some changes have been made to the available schemes this year, including:

- New options to help improve air quality, reduce ammonia emissions and improve water quality. Advice will be available from Catchment Sensitive Farming Officers to ensure these environmental actions are targeted to where they can best benefit priority habitats

- An improved Countryside Stewardship capital grant offer, making 67 options available which can sit alongside a Countryside Stewardship Wildlife offer
- New wood pasture options in the uplands, at payment rates suitable for upland application, providing a mosaic habitat of grassland, scrub and trees
- The Countryside Stewardship capital offer to be available to Higher Level Stewardship (HLS) agreement holders, where the options are compatible
- Improved woodland options, including bringing bracken control and stone wall options into woodland management and combining Woodland Creation and Woodland Maintenance grants
- Increased number of capital items that farmers can apply for using the Rural Payments service, covering water capital, hedgerows and boundaries and air quality
- Expanded eligibility criteria for the upland option UP2 (management of rough grazing for birds), enabling more land managers to access this option and further improve the upland offer

Following customer feedback, the Rural Payments Agency has further built on simplifications to the scheme and introduced more functionality to make it easier to apply online, simplified Mid-Tier options to make them easier to understand and changed the focus of Countryside Stewardship inspections for domestic agreements to support the delivery of environmental outcomes, offering advice and allowing things to be put right or paid on smaller areas without additional penalties.

**Rural Payments Agency Chief Executive Paul Caldwell said:**

It is easier than ever to enter into an agreement. We have worked hard to make CS simpler to apply for and for us to administer, which has seen the number of farmers who enter into agreements improve year on year. I'd urge everyone to complete their applications promptly and ensure that they don't leave things to the last minute.

CS is an opportunity to get into an agri-environment scheme which rewards farmers and land managers for their vital work to protect our countryside and enhance the environment for generations to come.

Farmers and land managers who are new to taking on environmental work or with expired or expiring Environmental Stewardship agreements can apply for:

- Mid-Tier – Farmers and land managers can enter five-year agreements – for revenue and capital payments and Wildlife Offer revenue-only agreements. These grants will provide a range of management options and capital items together in order to help deliver on a wide range of environmental benefits.
- Higher Tier – Applicants managing more complex land in environmentally

significant sites, commons or woodlands which requires support from Natural England or the Forestry Commission. These are five or 10-year agreements.

- Capital Grants Manual – for two-year agreements. This includes an expanded offer with 67 capital items now available covering boundaries, trees and orchards. Water quality and air quality items can also be applied for if you have a Mid-Tier Wildlife Offer.

#### **Woodland support:**

- Woodland Tree Health Manual and Woodland Management Plan Manual: These will sit alongside wider woodland creation offers available outside of CS. The Woodland Tree Health grant offers help to restore and improve tree health. The Woodland Management Plant Manual grant helps to create a UK Forestry Standard compliant management plan.
- Woodland Creation and Maintenance Manual: An integrated 2+10-year agreement to help ensure trees planted under the woodland creation grant in the first two years of the agreement are maintained for a further 10 years. This grant is to support new woodland and its longer-term maintenance. The maintenance element of this scheme is not automatic – the customer would have to be eligible.

The RPA announced in January its [best-ever performance](#) which saw more full CS payments issued earlier than before.

Those new to Countryside Stewardship can find out more by attending farm advice events, with a schedule of local events due to be available on GOV.UK.

Some items in Mid Tier and the Capital Grants Scheme require support from a Catchment Sensitive Farming Officer. Check the scheme requirements to see when this applies. The Catchment Sensitive Farming (CSF) partnership will support those applications that offer the greatest environmental gains in high priority water areas to improve water and air quality. If your holding is in a high priority water area, download and complete a [Request for CSFO Approval Form](#) and send it to your local CSF Officer, at least six weeks before the deadline.

To apply and find out more visit [GOV.UK](#). Information manuals can be downloaded online from [GOV.UK](#), or you can request to receive an application pack in the post by contacting Rural Payments Agency (RPA).