

News story: Environment Secretary announces bridging payments for Basic Payment Scheme 2016

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Bridging payments secured for eligible farmers awaiting their full BPS payment for 2016

Environment Secretary Andrea Leadsom has secured bridging payments for farmers awaiting their full BPS payment for 2016, to ease their financial cash flow.

To date BPS payments worth £1.52 billion have been made to more than 82,000 (95.5%) farmers in England. These include payments on a range of claim types and sizes, including cross-border, young farmer, those inspected and common land claims.

Any eligible farmer who has not received their full payment for 2016 by the end of March will be offered a bridging payment for 75% of their claim value.

Speaking at the 2017 NFU Conference, Andrea Leadsom said:

As of today 95.5% of farmers have received their 2016 basic payment, but I recognise that if you're one of the 4,000 still waiting – you need to know when you will get paid.

So this week I secured agreement from the Treasury to offer a 75% bridging payment to anyone with outstanding payments by the end of March.

The Rural Payments Agency remains focused on paying the remainder of eligible claims as promptly as possible.

News story: 750 apprenticeships in government open for applications

The [Civil Service Fast Track Apprenticeship programme](#) is now open for applications. There are 750+ positions across 46 locations across England, Scotland and Wales. The Civil Service is calling on ambitious people from all backgrounds to apply so the Civil Service reflects the society that it serves.

The Civil Service Fast Track Apprenticeship is an exciting talent programme which allows you to earn a salary starting from £19,500 (£22,000 minimum in London) while you work towards a Level 4 apprenticeship, gaining the skills and experience that you'll need for a successful career in the Civil Service.

Apprenticeships are available in:

Sir Jeremy Heywood, Cabinet Secretary and Head of the Civil Service said:

The Civil Service Fast Track Apprenticeship programme is a fantastic opportunity for young people in this country with ambition, talent and enthusiasm to join one of the greatest organisations in the country, at what is a hugely exciting time to be a part of the Civil Service.

Fast Track Apprentice Skeena Ali said:

You're given a lot of support and management are very ambitious with your progression. The whole point of Fast Track is that you're going to be one of future leaders of the Civil Service, so they invest a lot in you.

Once apprentices have completed the Fast Track, they are eligible to apply for a range of roles within the Civil Service, including the [Civil Service Fast Stream](#). The Fast Stream is the flagship graduate scheme of the Civil Service.

Applications are open until 3 April 2017.

[Read the apprenticeship scheme brochure.](#)

Tens of thousands of businesses won't benefit from SNP rate relief plan

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- Tens of thousands of businesses won't benefit from SNP rate relief plan

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Nearly 100,000 businesses facing rates rises will not benefit from the relief plan announced by the SNP Government yesterday.

Following pressure from the Scottish Conservatives, finance secretary Derek Mackay announced a one-year 12.5% cap on rates rises for the hospitality industry and for office premises in the North East.

However it was condemned as a mere 'sticking plaster' by the Scottish Retail Consortium.

And a detailed breakdown of Scottish Government figures has revealed that the relief plan will benefit just 9,530 businesses, with 98,777 not receiving any help at all from the Scottish Government.

This includes 8,899 businesses in Glasgow, with just 563 being helped by yesterday's announcement.

Scottish Conservative shadow finance secretary Murdo Fraser said:

"For weeks the SNP ignored the issue of business rates, and now it turns out that their proposed plan will only help a fraction of businesses.

"Around Scotland businesses are facing closure if they don't receive real help from the Scottish Government, but these figures show that the vast majority will still not receive any assistance.

"It's no wonder that Derek Mackay's statement has done little to ease concerns in the business community, especially as even those who do benefit from this plan will only see their rates capped for a year.

"We need to see meaningful action from the SNP if we are to avoid seeing these businesses going to the wall, and it's becoming clear that the SNP need to go back to the drawing board on this plan."

News story: Business Secretary and Ministers hold meeting with leading retailers

Business Secretary Greg Clark chaired a roundtable today (22 February 2017) with the country's top retailers and trade bodies to discuss the sector's priorities and how the government's [Industrial Strategy](#) can help the industry respond to future opportunities and challenges.

At the meeting, Greg Clark stressed the vital role the UK retail sector has as a driving force in our economy, and the critical part it has to play in delivering the government's vision of an economy which works for everyone. The Business Secretary was joined by Small Business and Consumer Minister Margot James and Jane Ellison, Financial Secretary to the Treasury. They met chief executives from the UK's top retailers including ASOS, Boots, Shop Direct, Co-op Group, Dixons Carphone, Sainsbury's-Argos and Superdrug as well as key industry trade bodies, the British Retail Consortium (BRC), the Federation of Small Businesses and British Independent Retailers Association.

Following the meeting, Business Secretary Greg Clark said:

"The retail sector makes an invaluable contribution to our economy, delivering £340 billion of sales in 2015 alone. It is vitally important that government and industry work closely together to help the sector create high skilled and high paying jobs across the UK, improve productivity and shape the future of retail in the UK.

"The retail roundtable was a great opportunity to discuss the sector's priorities and how the government can support it through our Industrial Strategy, helping it build on its existing strengths, address challenges and seize new opportunities."

Helen Dickinson OBE, Chief Executive of the British Retail Consortium said:

"We are committed to ensuring that the retail industry is able to maximise its future contribution to the UK's success. There is a strong partnership role for the retail industry to play in assisting in the development of the government's Industrial Strategy, to contribute to a strong British economy in the future.

"The Industrial Strategy is an opportunity to collaborate to shape the implications of the industry's transformation for the benefit of our customers, the workforce and the government's productivity agenda."

During the meeting the retail sector presented their initial thinking on a potential sector deal with government, including how skills, trade and place based activity could help drive up the productivity, growth and sustainability of the sector.

As well as getting feedback from retailers on how the government can support the sector through its Industrial Strategy, other topics that were discussed included the future direction of the sector and how it can help improve UK productivity.

A full list of participants:

- Amazon
- Asda
- ASOS
- Associated British Foods (Primark)
- Association of Convenience Stores
- British Independent Retailers Association
- British Retail Consortium
- Co-op
- Dixons Carphone
- Federation of Small Businesses
- GFirst LEP
- John Lewis Partnership
- Kingfisher
- Lloyds Pharmacy
- Marks and Spencer
- WM Morrisons
- National Federation of Retail Newsagents
- Sainsbury's-Argos
- Shop Direct
- Superdrug (Hutchison Whampoa Europe Ltd)
- Tesco
- Walgreens Boots Alliance

[News story: Crime news: LGFS consultation and fee cut update](#)

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Consultation on reforming payments through the Litigators' Graduated Fee Scheme and changing rates for court appointee work is now open.

Proposals to change how payments are calculated for Crown Court work are set out in a 6-week consultation called 'Litigators' Graduated Fee Scheme and Court Appointees'.

The consultation opened on 10 February and closes on 24 March 2017. It proposes changing the basis on which LGFS payments are calculated and capping payments to court appointees at legal aid rates.

Second fee cut

The government has said that it is minded not to reinstate the second (8.75%) fee cut for defence litigators that was suspended in April 2016 for a period of 12 months.

This is subject to the outcome of the consultations on proposals for 'LGFS and Court Appointees'.

Partnership working on LGFS

The government wants to work with the Law Society and other representative bodies to reform LGFS so that it better measures the relative complexity of cases.

The idea is to reduce or remove reliance on counting Pages of Prosecution Evidence (PPE). In the short term, the government would also like to act quickly to lower the upper limit for counting PPE.

PPE is no longer seen as the most effective way of assessing how much work a litigator needs to do on individual cases.

Payments to court appointees

The consultation also seeks views on capping payments to court appointees at legal aid rates.

Court appointees are paid at rates that are significantly higher than legal aid rates. This is for carrying out work that is very similar to criminal legal aid work.

The government view is that these higher rates cannot be justified.

Further information

[MoJ consultation: LGFS and court appointees](#)