



Forestry Commission Scotland
Coimisean na Coilltearachd Alba

Customer Charter

Forestry Grant Scheme

FEB2018



This Charter sets out the Customer Service Standards for Forestry Commission Scotland's (FCS) handling of application and capital claims for grant under the Forestry Grant Scheme (FGS) within the Scottish Rural Development Programme (SRDP) 2014–2020.

Scottish Government Rural Payments & Inspections Division (RPID- act as EU Paying Agency) has overall responsibility for delivery of SRDP schemes and is required to make all payments.

This Charter commits **all** participants, including FCS, RPID, consultees and applicants/claimants, to deal with applications and capital claims in a business-like manner with the objective of meeting the agreed target times.

FGS applications are dealt with by FCS staff as they are received and progressed towards approval throughout the year.

Our aim for all FGS applications

We aim to:

- deal with 90% of applications within the timescales set out in this document
- send you a **draft contract**:
 - **within 13 weeks** of accepting your completed and submitted application if woodland creation included in your application scores highly against our threshold score, is under no current budget pressures, and where you have engaged and followed our guidance for “Preparing a woodland creation proposal”; or
 - **within 10 weeks** of accepting your completed and submitted application for non-woodland creation cases

General response times within FGS processing

We will acknowledge requests and/or submissions within three working days.

If we need to ask you for further information, or to clarify aspects of your application after the consultation period, then we may need up to two weeks each time this happens to review the information you provide.

If major issues emerge with your application that FCS has to resolve or if we cannot meet these target times for example during exceptionally busy periods, then we will inform you of this delay as soon as we identify it. In general, we aim to acknowledge receipt of information supplied within three days.

Earned Recognition

Some forestry owners and agents will be recognised by FCS as a consistent provider of a professional service in delivering high quality woodland creation proposals and will be able to apply to be part of an Earned Recognition Scheme. These applicants will submit their FGS Woodland Creation applications as normal but, as we will expect such applications to be right first time, we will initiate the Woodland Creation formal notification and consultation period on receipt of the FGS application and then we will carry out its assessment of these applications concurrently.

For applications submitted by applicants without Earned Recognition we will not initiate the formal notification and consultation exercise until we have fully assessed the proposals contained in the FGS application.

Initially Earned Recognition status will only be available for FGS Woodland Creation and FGS Forest Plan applications.

For Earned Recognition, we aim to:

- send you a **draft contract within nine weeks** of accepting your completed and submitted application if woodland creation included in your application meets the higher threshold score, is under no current budget pressures and where you have engaged and followed our guidance for "Preparing a woodland creation proposal".

Our aim for all FGS capital claims

Until further notice, FCS will be processing capital claims on a manual paper based basis. There is no IT developed for this and so there is a reliance on our staff and customers to get information correct without the benefit of IT validations and verifications.

We aim to:

- deal with 90% of applications within the timescales set out in this document
- send you your **payment within eight weeks** of accepting your completed and fully supported claim or
- **10 weeks if inspections are required**

If there are major issues that we have to resolve with your claim or supporting documents or if we cannot meet these times, for example during exceptionally busy periods, we will inform you of this delay as soon as we identify it.

Your aim for all FGS applications and capital claims

You will:

- supply all the required supporting information as detailed in our guidance with each application and claim noting that the time it takes us to process your application is reliant on the quality of your application and its supporting documents
- respond to requests for information as soon as possible and within four weeks
- acknowledge that if you fail to meet our response timelines and you do not make special representation for an extension, we will withdraw your application or claim.

FCS performance and monitoring

Performance against the charter will be assessed through sample monitoring of FGS casework.

We are aiming to develop our workflow based Case Management IT System from which (at a point in the future) we will:

- assess our performance by monitoring progress and timings of FGS case work using FCS' Case Management System
- work towards publishing the results on the FCS website
- discuss results regularly with the FCS Customer Representatives Group

Review and updating

After an initial period of 18 months, we will revisit and review the charter, jointly with the FCS Customer Representatives Group.

If you are not satisfied with the way FCS have handled your application or claim, you can discuss your concerns with the local Conservator at your **local Conservancy office**. If the difficulty remains unresolved, you should take this up with the FCS Head of Delivery and Regions.

If you wish to submit a formal complaint, please do this in writing directly to the local conservancy office or FCS National Office in Edinburgh.

Appendix 1

Breakdown of processing stages

Appendix 1 to this document provides a breakdown of the FGS application process, including work undertaken at the woodland creation proposal pre-application stage.

This breakdown gives you an indication of the main processing stages and, as a guideline, we have provided some expected timelines. Please note that the stage timelines are listed as a guide only and these are not measured separately within the context of the Customer Charter. Only the total FCS time taken in processing your application (e.g. 13 weeks, nine weeks) will be measured towards our Customer Charter commitment.

Customer's Charter: FGS application process

Pre-application advice – all applications	
Conducted in accordance with our separation of duties/conflict of interest responsibilities	
We will <ul style="list-style-type: none">acknowledge requests for attending pre-application site visits, providing pre-application advice and/or screening.	General guideline time: within three working days
Pre-application advice – preparing Woodland Creation proposals	
Conducted in accordance with our separation of duties/conflict of interest responsibilities	
We will <ul style="list-style-type: none">acknowledge requests for attending pre-application site visits, providing pre-application advice and/or screening.	General guideline time: within three working days
You will <ul style="list-style-type: none">make an assessment on whether you wish to engage with FCS and/or consultees and other stakeholders to work up due diligence on your woodland creation proposal prior to submitting your FGS application.find details and advice on this in our “Preparing a woodland creation proposal” guidance.acknowledge that if you carry out due diligence, then when you submit your FGS application, the process from submission to contract approval will generally be much shorter in time as much of the issues will have been addressed.acknowledge that if you choose to make FCS first aware of your WC proposals at FGS application submission stage, then FCS, when assessing your proposal, may ask you to revisit the “Preparing a woodland creation proposal” guidance – thus adding time before we can issue our approval.	
We will <ul style="list-style-type: none">offer an Issues Log by way of managing the on-going preparation of your woodland creation proposal.ensure ongoing correspondence with you and will respond to detailed requests for input.	General guideline time: up to two weeks each time we are asked for detailed input (unless we are in exceptionally busy periods)
You will <ul style="list-style-type: none">make your decision on whether to request formal consultation and/or input onto EIA/Grants public register.make your decision as to when to submit your FGS application.	

FGS application submitted

We will

- assign the FGS application to an officer and start to process it.

General guideline time:
within three working days

If your preferred method of contact is by post, we will send your application acknowledgement within three working days.

You will

- ensure that you supply all the required details to enable us to process your application as per the eligibility requirements of the specific option. This may include:
 - maps
 - quotes
 - operational plans etc.
- try to respond to our queries and correspondence as soon as possible.
- **note that the time it takes us to process your application is reliant on the quality of your application and its supporting documents.**

We will

- begin formal assessment of your application including:
 - application and option level eligibility checks
 - assessment of supporting documents
 - assessment of silvicultural aspects
 - financial assessments
 - scoring
- aim to visit the site where this is appropriate.
- confirm if changes or further information is required.
- aim to provide one response once we have concluded all aspects of the application assessment.

General guideline time:
within four weeks

Please note that if you had engaged with FCS at the due diligence stages pre-application, then some aspects of our assessment checks will have already been undertaken (such as site visits, silviculture aspects, UKFS adherence, EIA screening opinion, etc.) and so you will find that our interaction with you for more information on such issues should not be required and that our officers will not need to re-assess elements already assessed. This could greatly reduce this time.

We will

- inform you if we need further information or clarification on an aspect of your application.

Clock stops from when you are informed until the information is supplied/clarified

*Please note that if any response to a request for additional information is not received within **four weeks** the application will be “deemed to be new” and the clock will start from the beginning. This is to ensure our officers are always up to speed with the detail of your case and to lower your expectations that we should deal with your late submissions immediately.*

Failure to respond within eight weeks will result in a withdrawal of your application.

You will

- acknowledge that if you fail to meet our response timelines and you do not make special representation for an extension, we will withdraw your application.

Case will be withdrawn if you fail to respond within our timelines

We will

- require additional time to carry out any re-assessment of your application where we have requested further information or clarification.

General guideline time:
up to **one additional week** each time we need to ask for further information

Notification/consultation (Woodland Creation Only)

We will

- if this has not already happened at the pre-application woodland creation stages, then we will place woodland creation applications on our public register when consultation and/or EIA notifications are required.

General guideline time:
four weeks

Consultees should respond within four weeks unless, in exceptional cases, they get agreement from us that an extension is appropriate. We will inform you of any extension.

Woodland Creation applications submitted with Earned Recognition

We will

- if this has not already happened at the pre-application woodland creation stages (EIA public register), then we will place the woodland creation applications on our public register when consultation and/or EIA notifications are required; and
- begin formal assessment of your application including:
 - application and option level eligibility checks
 - assessment of supporting documents
 - assessment of silvicultural aspects
 - financial assessments
 - scoring
- aim to visit the site where this is appropriate.
- confirm if changes or further information is required.
- aim to provide one response once we have concluded all aspects of the application assessment.

General guideline time:
four weeks

Consultees should respond within four weeks unless, in exceptional cases, they get agreement from us that an extension is appropriate. We will inform you of any extension

Please note that if you had engaged with FCS at the due diligence stages pre-application, then some aspects of our assessment checks will have already been undertaken (such as site visits, silviculture aspects, UKFS adherence, EIA screening opinion, etc.) and so you will find that our interaction with you for more information on such issues should not be required and that our officers will not need to re-assess elements already assessed. This could greatly reduce this time.

We will

- inform you if we need further information or clarification on an aspect of your application

Clock stops from when you are informed until the information is supplied/clarified

*Please note that if any response for a request for additional information is not received within **four weeks** the application will be “deemed to be new” and the clock will start from the beginning. This is to ensure our officers are always up to speed with the detail of your case and to lower your expectations that we should deal with your late submissions immediately.*

Failure to respond within eight weeks will result in a withdrawal of your application.

You will

- acknowledge that if you fail to meet our response timelines and you do not make special representation for an extension, we will withdraw your application.

Case will be withdrawn if you fail to respond within our timelines

We will

- require additional time to carry out any re-assessment of your application where we have requested further information or clarification.

General guideline time:
up to **one additional week** each time we need to ask for further information

Post-Notification/consultation (Woodland Creation Only)	
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● consider consultation responses <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – assess if issues raised are material – if changes to your application are required 	<p>General guideline time: up to two weeks</p>
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● request further information if required 	<p>General guideline time: up to 1 additional week from the time we receive additional information</p>
<p><i>The stage includes the time we represent and discuss your responses with Consultees. In complex cases, additional time may be require.</i></p>	

FCS final approval & contract issue	
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● hold a clearing process for each application but the requirements for clearing will differ according to the application: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> – pre-approval clearing process for applications that meet the higher threshold score, allowing Conservancies to issue a contract. – monthly clearing process for low scoring applications – though these could have a maximum wait of four weeks for the clearing round, the vast majority of applications are submitted for clearing in the final week before clearing takes place. On final approval, issue a signed contract. ● Note: some options will require the results of a judging panel (for example, Harvesting & Processing) and these will sit annually or sooner (if budget headroom available) 	<p>General guideline time:</p> <p>up to two weeks</p> <p>up to five weeks</p>

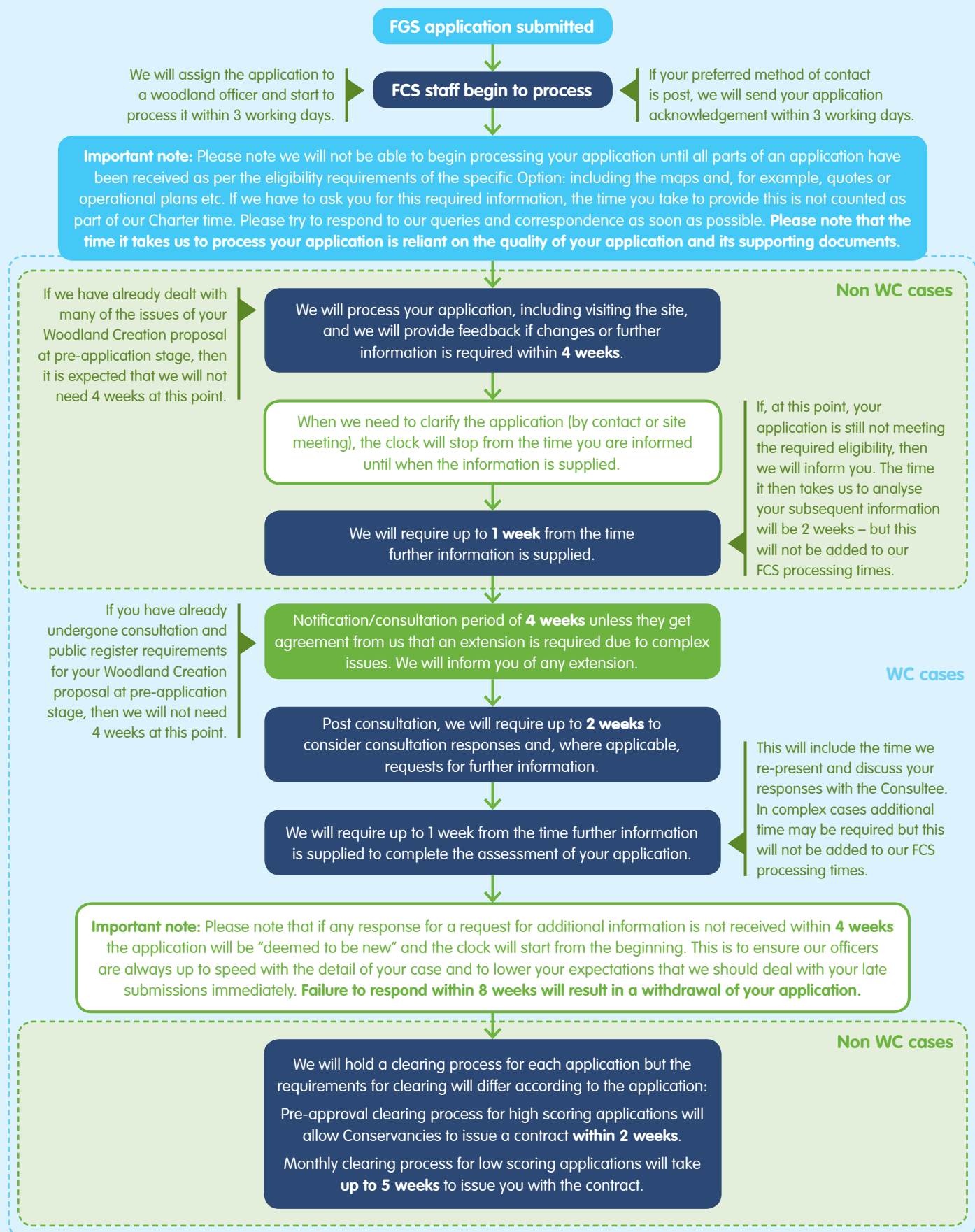
Contract return	
<p>You will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● return the signed contract to FCS. 	<p>General guideline time: within four weeks</p>
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● issue an acknowledgement once the signed contract is received. ● send a reminder if the signed contract in not returned to FCS within four weeks. 	<p>General guideline time: within three working days</p>
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● allow an extension to return the signed contract to FCS if you fail to do so within four weeks. 	<p>General guideline time: up to two additional weeks</p>
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ● withdraw your proposal and reallocate any funding if the signed contract is not returned to FCS. 	<p>General guideline time: six weeks (initial four weeks plus two week extension)</p>

Customer's Charter: FGS capital claims process

Capital Claim Submitted through to Payment	
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> acknowledge your receipt, assign the claim and start to process it. 	<p>General guideline time: within three working days</p>
<p><i>If your preferred method of contact is by post, we will send your application acknowledgement within three working days</i></p>	
<p>You will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ensure that you supply all the required details to enable us to process your claim as per the eligibility requirements of the specific option. This may include: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> maps invoices tree seed evidence etc. we must process claims as presented to us, so there is limited scope for us to come back to you for more information. Please take time to ensure your claim is correct before you submit it. If we need to request omitted supporting documents, please try to respond to our queries and correspondence as soon as possible. please note that the time it takes us to process your claim is reliant on the quality of your claim and its supporting documents. This is important because if we find errors that require National Office advice or confirmation on breaches and penalties, then this could lead to delays. 	
<p><i>Please note that if any response for a request for additional information is not received within four weeks the claim for grant will be "deemed to be new" and the clock will start from the beginning. This is to ensure our officers are always up to speed with the detail of your case and to lower your expectations that we should deal with your late submissions immediately.</i></p> <p>Failure to respond within eight weeks will result in a rejection of your claim.</p>	
<p>You will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> acknowledge that if you fail to meet our response timelines and you do not make special representation for an extension, we will reject your claim. 	<p>Case will be withdrawn if you fail to respond within our timelines</p>
<p>We will</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> begin formal assessment of your claim including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> desk based checks against the contract and supporting information carry out a regulatory controlled inspection selection process and, where an inspection is to be carried out: Visiting site and reporting on findings all claim findings recorded and claim amount certified as correct, certified with adjustments or notified for rejection or penalties confirm the payment value and any other required action (remedial works, rejection, penalties, etc.) pass the claim to RPID staff for them to manually process your payment and apply to draw down the money from the SG and EU accounts receive confirmation, from RPID, that payment has been made to you 	<p>General guideline time: within 10 weeks where claims are selected for an inspection or within eight weeks where no inspection is required</p>

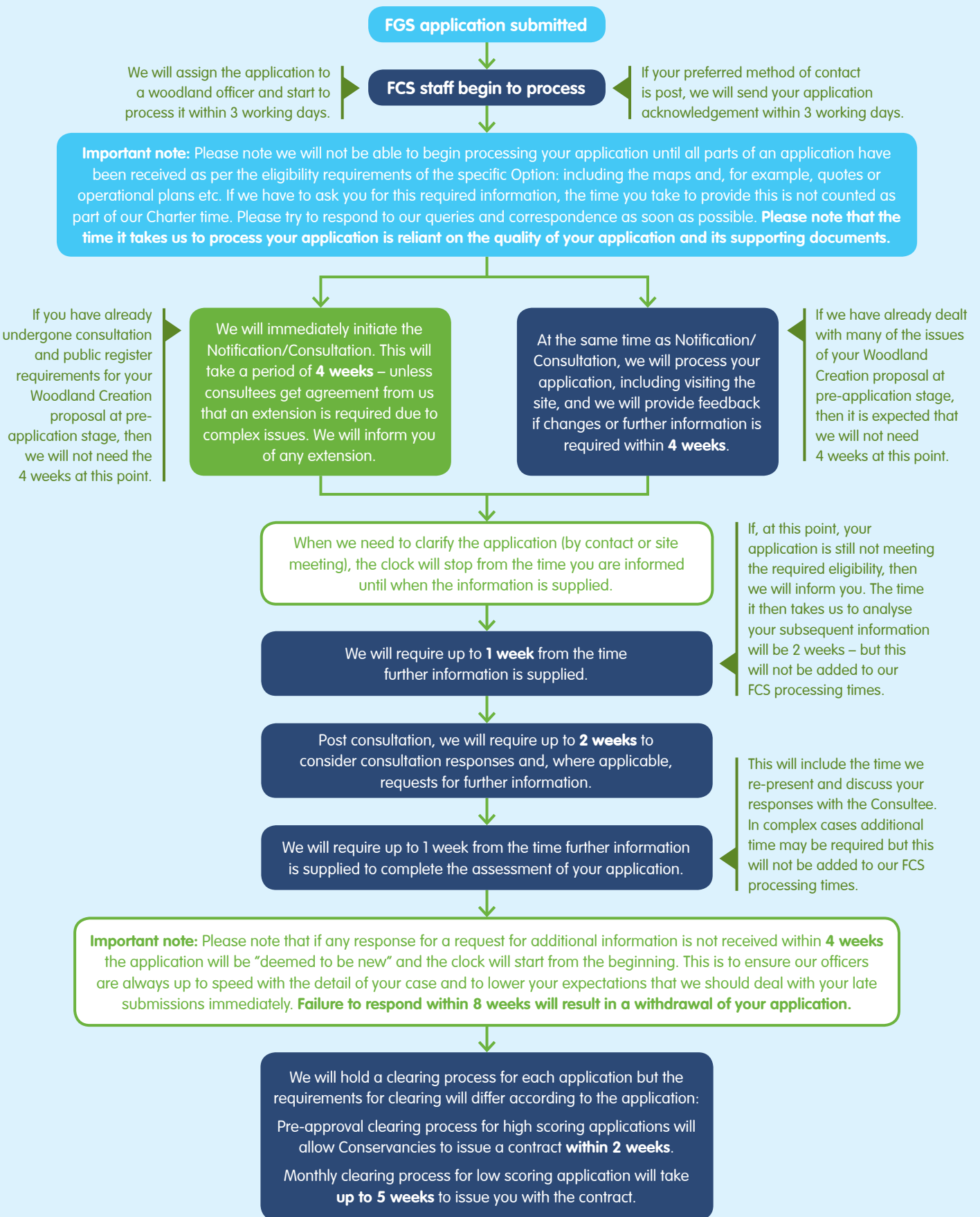
FGS application process

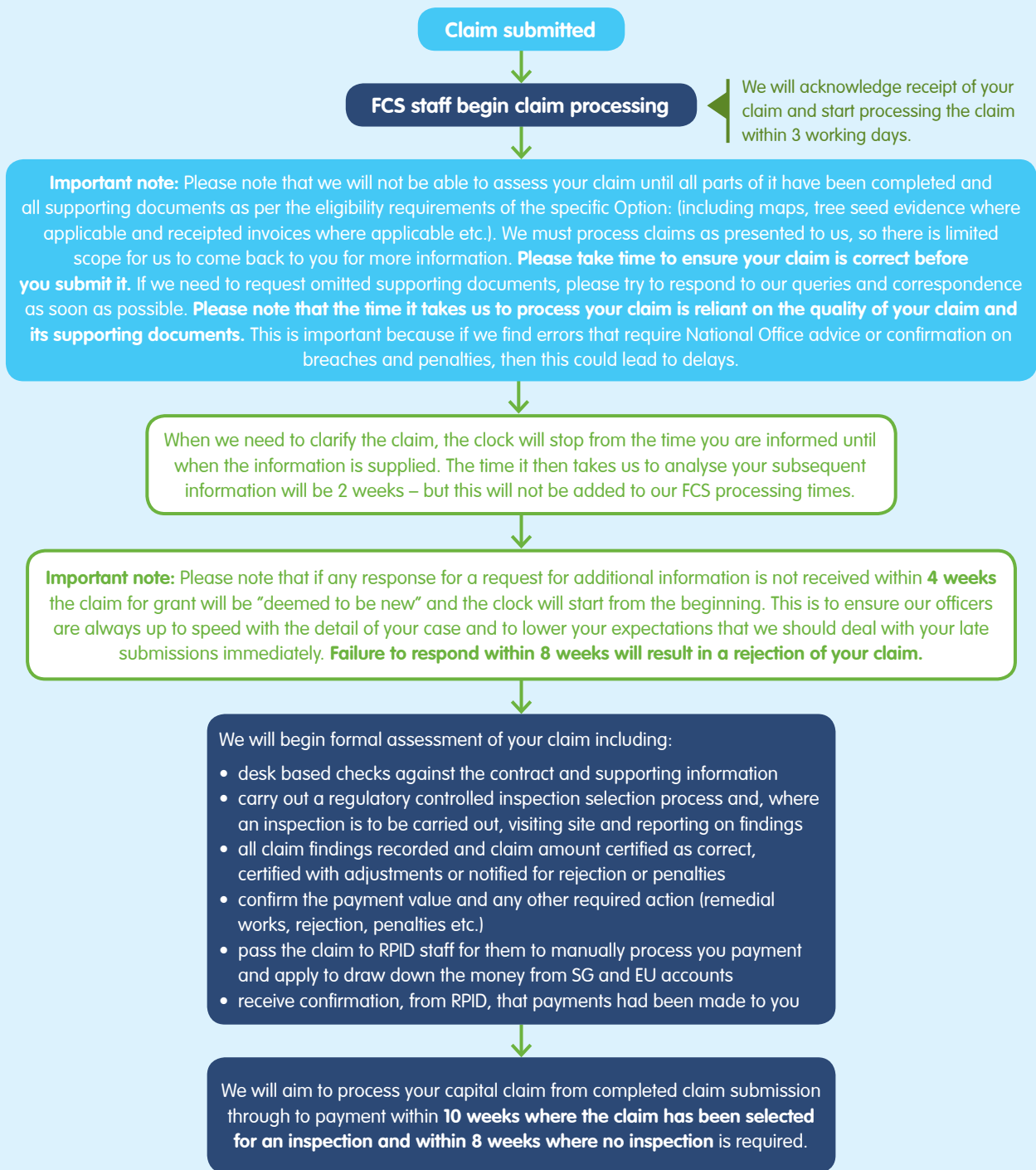
Applicant FCS Consultee



FGS application process: Earned Recognition

Applicant FCS Consultee







Forestry Commission Scotland serves as the forestry directorate of the Scottish Government and is responsible to Scottish Ministers

Contact

Forestry Commission Scotland
National Office
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh
EH12 7AT

Tel: 0300 067 6156
E-mail: fcscotland@forestry.gsi.gov.uk
Web: www.forestry.gov.uk/scotland

If you need this publication on an alternative format, for example in large print, please contact us on:

Tel: 0300 067 5000
E-mail: diversity@forestry.gsi.gov.uk

The Diversity Team
Forestry Commission
Silvan House
231 Corstorphine Road
Edinburgh
EH12 7AT