



# **Business Plan One-to-One Farm Advisory Service 2025**



DELIVERED BY RICARDO ENERGY & ENVIRONMENT ON BEHALF OF SCOTTISH  
GOVERNMENT

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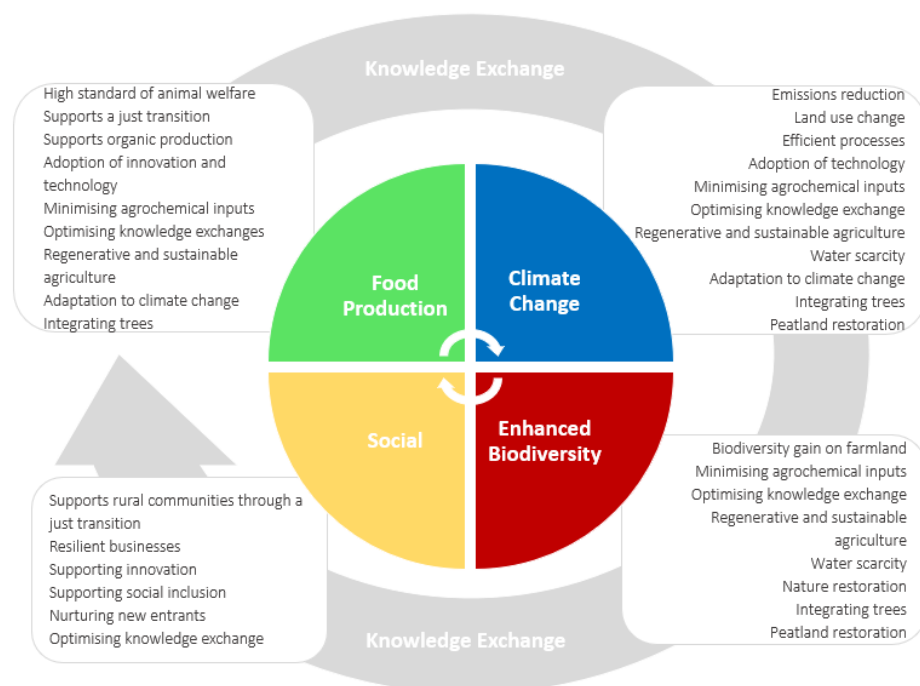
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# 1 EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Scottish Government have a vision for Scotland to become a global leader in sustainable and regenerative agriculture. To deliver this, Scotland needs an advisory service that supports the delivery of high-quality food production, climate mitigation and adaptation, and nature restoration. As the agricultural sector responds to significant changes driven by technological advancements, environmental concerns, economic shifts, global politics and evolving consumer preferences, the support and advisory needs of the sector will also evolve. The Farm Advisory Service (FAS) provides a professional and credible advisory service to ensure that the agricultural sector have the knowledge and support to make the right changes and to seize the new opportunities that change will bring. The FAS delivers a support service to farmers and crofters under a single overarching brand identity but delivered under two separate interlinking contracts; the FAS one-to-many and the FAS one-to-one contracts.

**Figure 1: Advice delivered by the Farm Advisory Service to achieve the Vision for Agriculture**



The one-to-one Farm Advisory Service facilitates access to high quality one-to-one consultancy and mentoring support to help farmers, crofters and land managers ensure their businesses are resilient and ready to meet any challenges.

Building on the ever-increasing recognition of the Farm Advisory Service brand and reputation, it is anticipated that demand for support will continue to be high in this delivery year. The focus for this business plan is therefore ensuring quality of delivery and driving impactful; change through excellent advice and guidance, the focus should be on ensuring those supported get the best benefits rather than driving even higher demand. Ricardo will focus on the following key ingredients to deliver an outstanding service.

- Offer and facilitate high quality and assured Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs), Mentoring Advice (MA) and Specialist Advice (SA) for farmers, crofters and land managers in Scotland.
- Efficient grant management and administration - Ricardo understands the importance of providing a first-class service to safeguard the reputation of the programme. We offer a team with significant experience having managed this process for Scottish Government since 2016.

We will focus on providing:

- Clear and professional communications and web information
- Helpful and engaging customer support
- Quick processing of applications and communication of next steps
- Vigorous checks to verify the eligibility of all applicants and advisors.
- Quick processing of applications and communication of next steps
- Robust financial management of grant flow through - Grant monies will be held securely and managed in accordance with stringent procedures.
- Engaging in dialogue with stakeholders and providing flexibility in our approach - Stakeholder engagement is key to the integration of advice. Ricardo will facilitate this by developing a strong interface with the Scottish Government departments, NDPBs and NGOs who operate within the agricultural sector<sup>1</sup>. Ricardo will maintain regular dialogue with government and stakeholders to identify and ensure the Service is on the front foot in adapting to meet the changing needs of the sector and government.
- Promoting the service - Ricardo will offer a team of three marketing and communication specialists who will work with the programme manager and the team managing the FAS one-to-many contract to ensure the service is promoted in a professional, engaging and well-integrated campaign across the FAS delivery.
- Training of advisors - Ricardo will identify experts to provide training to advisors on emerging and critical elements of the programme or where we identify capability or capacity gaps in the service. We expect a focus on climate change mitigation and adaptation but will allow flexibility and adaptability as government and sector priorities emerge.
- Accreditation and verification of advisors - To ensure high standards of advice, Lantra will deliver Farm Business Advisor Accreditation Scheme for Scotland (FBAASS) services for ILMPs. Other specialist areas and mentoring will be individually assessed based on experience, education and training. Ricardo will use a detailed skills matrix to ensure the correct capability within the delivery team.

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<sup>1</sup> Including the Scottish Government Rural Payments and Inspections Division; the Scottish Rural Network; NatureScot; RSPB; Scottish Crofting Federation; Lantra; SEPA; Scottish Forestry; Historic Scotland; National Parks; the Crofting Commission; National Farmers' Union Scotland; Scottish Land and Estates; Quality Meat Scotland; Scottish Agricultural Organisation Society; Agriculture and Horticulture Development Board; and the Soil Association.

- Quality assurance is a high priority for Ricardo - to provide consistently high-quality advice all reports will be reviewed and must meet our quality standards.
- Provide a professional advice line facility where calls and emails from customers can be triaged for Farm Advisory Service support. Ricardo has 20 years' experience providing advice line support to the farming sector.

## 2 INTRODUCTION

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This document provides the plans for the delivery of the One-to-one Farm Advisory Service (FAS) from April 2025 to 31st March 2026. The plan ensures the continuity and stability for businesses within a familiar FAS structure supporting farmers through a period of significant uncertainty and change.

The One-to-One contract facilitates access to high quality one-to-one advisory support. This includes advice to improve biodiversity; increase awareness of habitat and carbon sequestration benefits of woodland planting; promote climate change adaptation and mitigation opportunities; improve business management and efficiency; encourage inclusivity by supporting new entrants and women in agriculture; and helping to support the industry and Scottish government to evolve to meet future challenges.

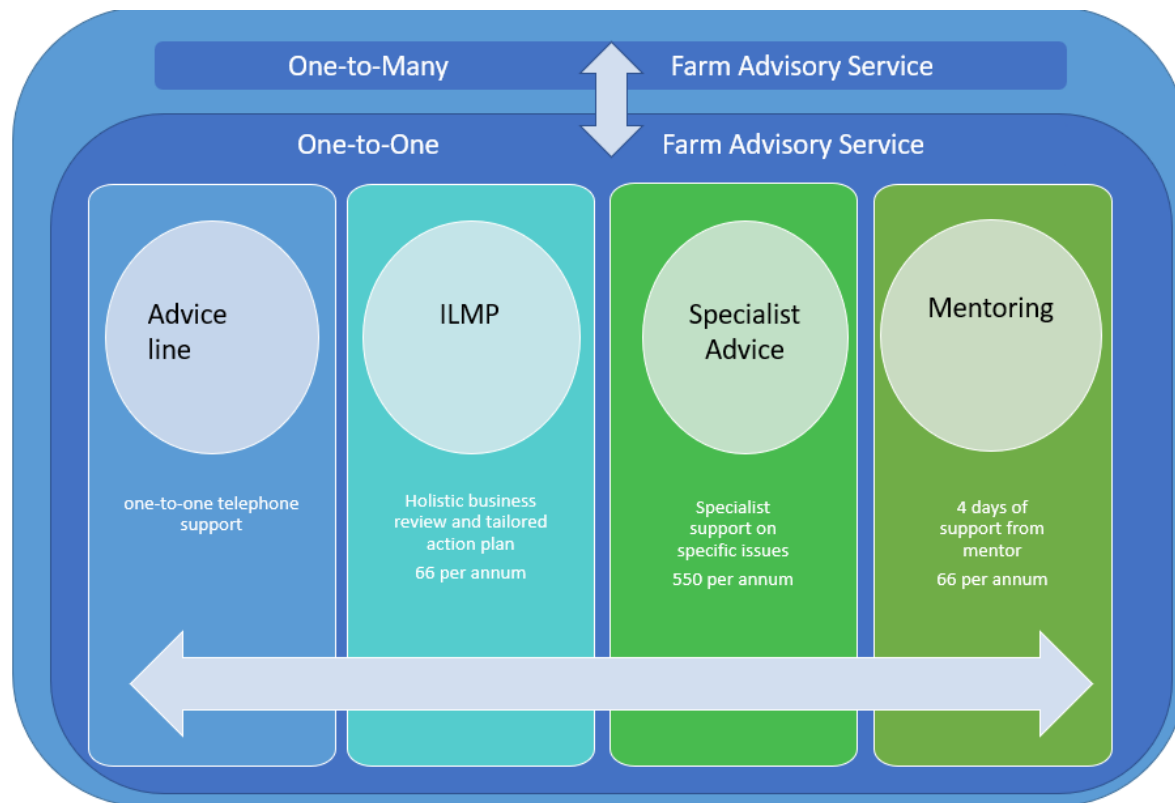
The aims of the service fall under these current priorities:

- Fostering knowledge transfer and innovation in agriculture.
- Enhancing the viability and competitiveness of all types of agriculture and promoting innovative farm technologies and sustainable forest management.
- Promoting food chain organisation, animal health and welfare and risk management in agriculture.
- Promoting resource efficiency and supporting the shift toward a low-carbon and climate resilient economy in the agriculture, food and forestry sectors.
- Restoring, preserving and enhancing ecosystems related to agriculture and forestry; and
- Improving economic and efficiency performance.

The service will encourage inclusivity by supporting new entrants and women in the sector. Ricardo will be proactive in working with the industry, stakeholders and the steering group to identify where new topics of advice are needed or where new delivery mechanisms could be introduced to ensure the Service best meets industry and policy needs.

### 3 TARGETS FOR 2025 DELIVERY

**Figure 2 Targets for delivery in 2025**



The carbon audit provision has been removed from this delivery plan due to the overwhelming demand which far exceeds the FAS budget for advice provision. The FAS could not meet the demand for carbon audits without a significant expansion of the delivery budgets, and retaining carbon audits puts disproportionate pressure on the budget to the deficit of other services. The reallocation of the carbon audit budget has enabled a greater focus on the specialist advice provision.

### 4 KEY PERFORMANCE INDICATORS

#### 4.1 Grant Delivery

Key Performance	Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Description
1	90% of users rate the ease of access to information as excellent or good.
2	90% of users rate the helpfulness at initial contact point as excellent or

3	90% of users rate the ease of application process as excellent or good.
4	90% of users rate the efficiency of scheme administration as excellent or
5	90% of users of ' <i>One to One product in question</i> ' would recommend the
6	90% would rate the adviser's/mentor's working practices as excellent or
7	90% would rate the quality of the report/support as excellent or good.
8	75% state that they will implement all the actions received.

## 4.2 Advice line

Key Performance	Key Performance Indicator (KPI) Description
1	95% of call-backs are done within six working hours.
2	95% of routine queries responded to within one working day.
3	95% of detailed queries responded to within two working days.
4	95% of complex queries responded to within five working days.
5	95% of email enquiries responded to within one working day.

## 5 SCOPE OF THE SERVICE

One-to-one support services are available to all, regardless of farm size or business stage. Through FAS, new and experienced farmers can access a range of expert consultancy and specialist advice to help them achieve their business aspirations. In 2025 the one-to-one service will offer farmers and crofters:

- Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMP) - Up to £2,000 funding per plan.
- Specialist advice - Up to £1,600 funding.
- Mentoring for new entrants to farming - Up to 4 days one-to-one with a personal mentor (£1,250).



## 5.1 Advice line

- The FAS provides an advice line to provide support to agricultural businesses through an email and telephone service.
- The advice line provides up to 60 minutes of support to a business per year. Support may range from complex technical/regulatory enquiries to helping with event bookings.
- Trained helpline operatives will triage calls; providing an immediate response if possible; directing callers to the appropriate FAS event; publication or one-to-one service or escalating to a technical advisor for more detailed guidance.
- The advisors are trained to identify and respond sensitively to farmers in distress and have guidance and defined contacts to refer callers to appropriate support services where necessary.
- All calls will be recorded and subjected to quality assurance checks to ensure a robust process for identifying issues and continuing development of the Service.

## 5.2 Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMPs)

The ILMP enables businesses to commission an FBAASS advisor to undertake a confidential assessment of the business and help develop a professional plan.

- Available to all farmers/crofters who hold a Business Reference Number (BRN) regardless of farm size or the stage in the business.
- The start point of an ILMP is the farmer's vision for the business and agreeing the objectives of the plan.
- ILMPs look at the full spectrum of business sustainability. Includes assessing the natural resources (public goods) upon which the business relies; conducting a financial review; and identifying strengths, weaknesses, and opportunities.
- Government funding to a maximum of 80% of the costs. Farmer to pay any costs above this threshold, plus VAT.
- For New Entrant, Croft and Small Farm customers the business will not need to pay the additional 20% of costs.

## 5.3 Specialist Advice

Supports the business to take a deeper look at specific issues of concern or interest. Each business is eligible to receive specialist advice support for two topics with funding for each. The specialist advice topics currently delivered are detailed below, however, the Service must be flexible to introduce new topics if the need arises.

- Animal Health and welfare

- Archaeological and historic sites
- Biodiversity, habitat and landscape
- Carbon audit action plan
- Climate change adaptation & mitigation
- Crofter's plan
- Farm business efficiency
- Organics
- Resilience planning
- Soil and nutrient management
- Succession planning
- Water pollution prevention and control
- Woodland creation, management and conservation

## 5.4 Mentoring for new entrants

- FAS pairs mentees with an experienced farmer or crofter who can provide tailored support and advice on how to manage, set up and grow the new business.
- Up to 4 days of free, one-to-one mentoring support available.
- Peer-to-peer relationship matched to the business's needs.
- Mentors paid an honorarium.
- The start of a friendship.
- The FAS supports the mentor and mentee with guidance and keeps in touch with both to ensure that the partnership is delivering to the satisfaction of both parties.

## 6 KEY DELIVERABLES

**Table 1 key deliverables**

	ANNUAL DELIVERABLES	ADDING VALUE
REPORTING AND MEETINGS	Monthly Reports (12)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Committed to providing accurate and transparent management information to support Scottish Government decision making.</li> <li>Supportive in identifying where FAS products can support wider Government goals.</li> <li>Proactive in seeking feedback to inform the continued development of the service. We understand that needs change and seek to innovate and evolve the service ahead of the curve.</li> </ul>
	Annual Report (1)	
	Bimonthly review meetings (x6)	
	Steering Group meetings (x4)	
SERVICE DELIVERY	ILMP's delivered (x66)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Our team of professional grant managers are dedicated to ensuring a customer focused delivery. Key to this is providing a friendly and prompt response to applications and enquiries.</li> <li>Experienced team with documented processes</li> <li>Accurate tracking of data and modelling of uptake to enable us to identify future promotional needs or to provide and early flag to Scottish Government potential areas where demand will exceed targets.</li> </ul>
	Specialist Advice (x550)	
	Mentoring delivered (x66)	
ADVICE LINE	Advice Line support available by telephone and email between 8.30am to 5pm, Monday to Friday (excluding bank holidays).	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Dedicated Advice Line team experienced in delivering advice to the agricultural sector.</li> <li>The call handling system records all inbound and outbound calls, and interactions are captured on a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, for accurate tracking, reporting &amp; robust quality assurance.</li> <li>The team have oversight of the one-to-one and one-to-many contract, ensuring a joined-up service for advice recipients.</li> <li>An extensive list of external technical advisors will allow the team to triage to an advisor with the right expertise and ensure that the advice provided is independent and there are no conflicts of interest.</li> </ul>
	Managing up to 1,700 enquiries annually.	
ACCREDITATION AND QUALITY ASSURANCE	Lantra accreditation of 100 advisors	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Peer to peer recommendation is highly influential in agriculture and quality speaks for itself. Ricardo is committed to ensuring that all work delivered by the service is to a standard we are proud of and is beyond the</li> </ul>
	All ILMPs peer reviewed	
	All reports quality reviewed	

	4 Meetings of Quality Review Panel	<p>minimum requirements of our own and Scottish Government quality standards.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ricardo will work closely with Lantra to ensure</li> </ul>
<b>PERSONAL AND FINANCIAL DATA MANAGEMENT</b>	12 Advisor pay-runs per annum (4 weekly cycle)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ricardo has developed a bespoke customer relationship management system for the FAS. This enables us to track all customer interactions with the programme and to provide prompt and accurate reporting to Scottish Government on; grant status; applicant information such as sector; farm size; performance feedback; and metrics on uptake of each service.</li> <li>Scottish Government has the reassurance that personal information is held in compliance with Data Protection Regulations in locked-down folders and password protected systems.</li> <li>Through payments of funds are managed by a professional finance team with audited systems, verifying the accuracy of data</li> </ul>
	Accurate data on grants applications and progress	
	Personal data held securely	
<b>MONITORING &amp; EVALUATION</b>	Feedback from advice recipient, analysed and reported	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>We seek to continuously improve the service. The feedback from each user is reviewed and lessons learnt identified which are used to refine our processes and feed into our training programme.</li> </ul>
<b>TRAINING &amp; DEVELOPMENT</b>	Presentations and training (x6 topics)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ricardo uses a range of techniques from training events to update communications to ensure advisors have the information they need to deliver to their best.</li> <li>A flexible training programme to respond to changing needs of the programme and needs identified through stakeholder engagement and programme evaluation.</li> </ul>
	Training events (x6)	
	E-newsletter (x4)	
<b>Marketing</b>	Web review (x1)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Ricardo will continue to identify new opportunities to promote the service and optimise customer uptake. The mix of activities proposed have proved to have the most impact and importantly feed into and provide consistency with the One-to-many activities, enabling consistency across the programme. The mix of video, podcast or written content will be reviewed to ensure the most appropriate deliver to target audiences.</li> <li>Targeting of communications will be informed by our understanding of key priorities for government and a review of current uptake to ensure we are continuing to drive demand where it is needed.</li> </ul>
	Case studies (x5)	
	Informational videos (x2)	
	Press releases and articles (x12)	
	E-tool kit to stakeholders (x4)	
	Social media updates (x24 on 'X', 24 Facebook, 3 google ads))	
	Direct Mail/E-mail (x4)	
	Attend stakeholder meetings,	

## 7 CONTRACT MANAGEMENT

### 7.1 Team Structure

**Figure 3 Team Structure**



Our governance structure comprises:

**The Service Manager**, Caroline Wood, as the single point of accountability for all work delivered under the contract and the first point of contact for all communications with the Scottish Government. Ricardo recognises the importance of providing a dedicated position for this throughout the lifetime of the contract to ensure effective and efficient delivery of the Service. Caroline has been the Service Manager since inception of the FAS in 2016 and we can confirm that Caroline will be available for the duration of this contract too.

**The Service Director**, Dave Freeman as second point of contact for the Scottish Government and an advisor available to support Caroline should the need arise.

**Advisor accreditation** will be provided by Lantra, to ensure that the external delivery team adhere to a minimum experience and skills requirement and that there is consistency in the advice provided. The FBAASS accreditation includes business management consultancy skills, ability to appraise the strengths and weaknesses of a business including implementation of strategy to improve business performance, understanding of key regulatory, environmental and subsidy topics, are client focused and credible, and that they hold the correct professional indemnity insurance to perform the role.

The governance structure provides:

- An experienced team who follow documented internal processes for effective management and consistently high quality delivery to customers.
- Robust grant management process, including management of flow through funds.
- Effective stakeholder engagement and integration with work delivered by the one-to-many programme.
- Excellent technical and policy oversight and quality assurance.

## 7.2 Reporting and Communications

- **Monthly reports** will detail the milestones achieved, metrics of delivery to date, plans for the next month, highlights and issues. Any issues will be updated on the shared FAS actions and issues log. In addition to the monthly report.
- **Annual report** will summarise the types, topics and advice activities conducted over the year, number of participants nationally and regionally, collate feedback from the year and consider any trends. The report will review issues raised and resolved through the year and lessons learnt and their implications on plans for the year ahead will be considered.
- **Bimonthly Meetings.** Ricardo will attend management meetings to jointly review delivery and performance, scheme uptake, feedback and outcomes achieved. The management group will discuss any issues and agree actions.
- **Steering Group Meetings.** Ricardo will provide service-related input at these meetings.
- **Stakeholder Group Meetings.** Ricardo will take the lead in delivering 4 quarterly stakeholder group meetings per year.

We understand that industry and government priorities will change over the lifetime of the project, the purpose of the communication activities detailed above is to ensure that there is ongoing dialogue so Scottish Government and Ricardo can agree and plan any changes to delivery that will be required.

## 7.3 Inclusion and diversity

It is vital that the support is available to all eligible crofters and farmers. Ricardo will ensure resources are made available to all, this includes printing and sending hard copies of reports and application forms or providing telephone guidance to those who are not comfortable or able to use computers or who have limited internet connections.

Ricardo will prioritise inclusion and accessibility, ensuring that the service is available regardless of age, race, gender, religion, or sexual orientation. Ricardo will work sensitively with applicants with a disability, making sure that we understand their needs and being flexible in our approach to providing support so we can provide the right assistance.

Ricardo will ensure service communications are inclusive using plain English, we will review images to ensure a fair representation and monitor uptake of support to verify that there is no bias which we will see reflected in uptake. Ricardo will be transparent in sharing this information with the service steering group, stakeholders and Scottish Government and will seek feedback on how we can improve accessibility. Ricardo will always respond positively to feedback and guidance provided.

## 7.4 Complaints and escalation process

The Service Manager will be informed of all complaints and will log details of the action taken and lessons learnt on a complaint register. Following each complaint, Caroline Wood (Service manager) and Dave Freeman (Project Director and Ricardo Director for Land) will review whether there is a need to provide further training or to modify procedures. Each complaint will be taken very seriously, we receive few complaints, but when they do occur, we ensure they are resolved swiftly, and learning are reviewed to support service improvement. Should a complaint be substantive Caroline will immediately inform Jack Dalziel (Scottish Government) and will discuss Ricardo's proposed resolution.

## 8 SERVICE OFFERING

In the current delivery window (4<sup>th</sup> July 2024-31 March 2027) Each business is eligible to receive 1 ILMP and 2 Specialist Advice Reports over the course of the contract; and up to 4 days of mentoring support for new entrants. Carbon Audits will not be available within the current business plan.

### 8.1 Integrated Land Management Plans (ILMP)

**Key components:** The Scottish Government, through FAS, offers funding to help Scottish farmers and crofters access expert consultancy support to develop a professional, Integrated Land Management Plan (ILMP) tailored for their farm or croft.

The purpose of an ILMP is to provide a holistic review, incorporating environmental, financial and other public good components into the business advice provided. The ILMP is an integrated plan that is specifically tailored to meet the wide-ranging requirements of the individual farm business or crofts. The ILMP will signpost opportunities for the farmers/crofters to gain more in-depth advice via the Specialist Advice.

The current ILMP is structured to ensure that each plan fully integrates all the components of sustainability and provides a balance in focus between environmental and economic performance and delivering public good benefits. The ILMP is flexible to cater for the diversity of farms and crofts, the challenges they face and the variance in business size and complexity. The aim is that the structure of the template prompts advisors to consider and review all relevant information, there are core elements that should be consistent across all plans, but to avoid being overly prescriptive. Accredited advisors will review the enterprise and consult with the farmer/crofter to develop ILMP's which focus on areas of greatest relevance to the individual business.

**Figure 4: Key components of an ILMP**



ILMPs are delivered by advisors accredited to the Farm Business Advisor Accreditation Scheme Scotland.

Grant assistance towards 80% cost of the ILMP (up to the maximum funding limit agreed by Scottish Government) is paid by the Farm Advisory Service direct to the advisor's company on evidence that the work has been completed. The programme will deliver up to 66 ILMPs per annum.

**Management Key Steps:** Ricardo will manage all aspects of ILMP delivery:

- *Template development and advisor guidance:* The current template and guidance for ILMPs will continue to be reviewed. The report must deliver maximum value for clients while supporting advisors in effective delivery. The ILMP will signpost opportunities for the farmers/crofters to gain more in-depth advice via the Specialist Advice, other government support schemes and FAS resources.



- *Communications*: Ricardo will provide information on the FAS website to promote an understanding of the value of an ILMP, the application and delivery process. Further promotion of the support will be delivered via a full communications and marketing campaign.
- *Application process*: Ricardo will provide an on-line and paper-based application form and telephone and email support to applicants and advisors to assist with any queries or support needs.
- *Eligibility checks*: Ricardo will check both the eligibility of the applicant to receive support, and that the advisor selected is FBAASS accredited so eligible to deliver the support.
- *Communications with the applicant and advisor*: Ricardo will keep both parties informed on the progress of the support. Should Ricardo identify a stalling in the delivery we will check-in with both the applicant and the advisor to identify if there is a problem and a need for us to intercede to ensure smooth delivery.
- *Quality assurance of the report*: All ILMPs will be quality assured by our peer review group of industry experts. Feedback will be provided to advisors and Ricardo will work with the advisor to ensure that the final version of the report that we issue to the client meets our quality standards.
- *Payment of advisor*: Upon completion of the support Ricardo will verify that we have received an eligible claim from the advisor and feedback from the client and only at this point will payment be made.

**Figure 5: ILMP process flow diagram**



## 8.2 Specialist Advice

Specialist advice supports the business to take a deeper look at specific issues of concern or interest, a business can benefit from two specialist advice plans, covering:

- climate change adaptation and mitigation
- soil and nutrient management
- biodiversity, habitat and landscape management
- water pollution, prevention and control
- archaeological and historic site advice
- resilience planning
- carbon audit action implementation
- farm/croft business efficiency
- organics
- woodland management and conservation
- animal health and welfare
- succession planning
- a crofter plan (crofter's ILMP)

**Management Key Steps:** Ricardo will manage all aspects of specialist advice delivery:

- *Template development and advisor guidance:* The specialist advice covers a broad range of topics and within each category of support there is a vast array of different aspects that might be covered by the specialist advice making it very difficult to instigate a rigid template. Ricardo have developed guidance for advisors on minimum expectations of a report and share example reports and suggested templates but allowing freedom within this for the expert advisor to tailor to meet the specific needs of the client. These templates and guidance will continue to be reviewed. The report must deliver maximum value for clients while supporting advisors in effective delivery.
- *Communications:* Ricardo will provide information on the FAS website to promote an understanding of the value of the specialist advice, the application and delivery process. Further promotion of the support will be delivered via a full communications and marketing campaign.
- *Application process:* Ricardo will provide an on-line and paper-based application form and telephone and email support to applicants and advisors to assist with any queries or support needs.
- *Eligibility checks:* Ricardo will check both the eligibility of the applicant to receive support and that the advisor selected to deliver the specialist support has the necessary academic qualifications, industry credentials and experience to be considered a specialist to deliver the support. A requirement of the service is that the specialist advisor is appropriately qualified to deliver this advice. This is defined as the advisor having relevant academic or professional qualifications (for example, membership of relevant chartered association) and at least 4 years of experience delivering advice in this area. To provide evidence of this, a copy of the chosen advisor's curriculum vitae (CV) or a record of appropriate experience gained while working with farmers in the specialist area (including professional accreditation) must be sent to the Farm Advisory Service for approval.

- *Communications with the applicant and advisor:* Ricardo will keep both parties informed on the progress of the support. Should Ricardo identify a stalling in the delivery we will check-in with both the applicant and the advisor to identify if there is a problem and a need for us to intercede to ensure smooth delivery.
- *Quality assurance of the report:* All specialist advice reports will be light-touch reviewed by a team of reviewers from Ricardo. The review will not be a deep technical review but will look to ensure the report aligned to the FAS objectives, met the objectives of the report and provided the business with clear recommendations and an action plan with the necessary signposting that the business would know what next steps to take and how to do this. The reviewer will also ensure that the report represents value for money. Should the reviewer have concerns and require a second opinion the report will be escalated to the service manager for a second review. If there are concerns regarding technical accuracy the service manager may refer the report on to an expert in the peer review group (industry experts) or consult with Scottish Government should there be any lack of clarity regarding levels of acceptability. Feedback will be provided to advisors and Ricardo will work with the advisor to ensure that the final version of the report that we issue to the client meets our quality standards.
- *Payment of advisor:* Upon completion of the support Ricardo will verify that we have received an eligible claim from the advisor and feedback from the client and only at this point will payment be made.

**Figure 6: Specialist Advice process flow diagram**



### 8.3 Mentoring for new entrants

**Key Components:** It is widely recognised that all professionals, wherever they are in their career, can benefit from having a mentor. However, there are more significant benefits for new entrants to receive mentoring support during their first few years after qualification/entry to the industry, having taken on land or a tenancy or when receiving grant support. Therefore, another advisory component for the FAS one-to-one advice programme is the mentoring for new entrants.

Mentoring support helps new entrants establish profitable and sustainable businesses. New entrants benefit from being paired with an experienced farmer in their sector, who can provide tailored support and advice on how to manage set up and grow the new farm or business. Typical skills that mentors offer include experience of running a farm business, traditional skills (e.g. stone walling and hedge laying), and food and drink industry experience.

The programme will seek to support 66 mentees per year.

**Management Key Steps:** The Service currently has 107 experienced farmers and crofters who have been approved to act as mentors. Mentors are recruited through stakeholders and the recommendations of our advisor network who between them have contact with a substantial proportion of the farmers, crofters and land managers in Scotland and an excellent knowledge of who the leading farmers are. It is these personal contacts that are most potent in encouraging an experienced farmer to get involved and share their knowledge. There is not a single approach to recruiting mentors, the recruitment will usually involve personal engagement and introduction. Ricardo asks interested mentors to complete a form which gathers information to enable us to create a profile which we keep on a database to enable us to match with mentees. When matching mentors and mentees we take account of the geographies, sectors and specific experience required. We try where possible to match people who are geographically close to one another as this can be helpful in introducing the new entrant with other new contacts in the area and allows for easy visiting. A real mark of success in the mentoring is when the pair meet through the programme but continue to engage and support each other long after the funded period.

Mentors come from a wide variety of backgrounds and experience, but key attributes include.

- A sound knowledge /experience of agriculture at a grass root level.
- A master of traditional skills e.g., stone walling, hedge laying.
- Land based educational/skills background.
- Food and drink industry.
- Finance/business planning.
- Surveying/planning.
- Knowledge of conservation and biodiversity.

- Forestry or woodland skills.

Ricardo will manage all aspects of mentoring:

- *Development of mentor guidance:* The current guidance for mentoring will continue to be reviewed. The guidance provided by FAS provides both sides of the partnership with a basic structure of how to get started and some suggested approaches. The process has been deliberately kept as unrestricted as possible to enable the pair to find a best fit for them, we suggest as a starting point the mentors and mentees visit each other's properties, from this point the mentoring might evolve in a number of ways such as the shadowing tasks on farm/croft or jointly visiting markets or events.
- *Communications:* Ricardo will provide information on the FAS website to promote an understanding of the value of mentoring, the application and delivery process. Further promotion of the support will be delivered via a full communications and marketing campaign. This includes working with the New Entrants to Farming Programme and Scottish Government's FONE group to ensure all new entrants who engage with this group or receive support via the Government are informed of the mentoring.
- *Application process:* Ricardo will provide an on-line and paper-based application form and telephone and email support to applicants to assist with any queries or support needs.
- *Eligibility checks:* Ricardo check the eligibility of the applicant to receive support and will work to identify a suitable mentor.
- *Communications with the mentee and mentor:* Ricardo will regularly check in with both parties to identify if the partnership is progressing well. Should Ricardo identify a need for us to intercede we will do so, to ensure smooth delivery.
- *Payment of mentor:* Upon completion of the support Ricardo will verify that we have received an eligible claim from the mentor and feedback from the mentee on the support provided and an important verification that the time claimed for is correct and only at this point will payment be made.

**Figure 7: Mentoring process flow diagram**





## 8.4 Advice Line

**Key Components:** The Advice Line is delivered by Ricardo's agricultural helpline team. With 20 years' experience, our team has a robust process for managing enquiries. They have excellent knowledge of agricultural subjects and have been trained regularly as the policy requirements and advice needs have evolved. This is extremely valuable as the Advice Line team understands the questions and context from many farming systems and situations and can discuss issues knowledgeably. The team has an engaging telephone manner and treat callers with care and concern. Farmers often phone an Advice Line feeling anxious or irritable and appreciate the warm response they receive. The team have received training in managing difficult conversations, with the latest refresher occurring in February 2024, and received specialist training in handling conversations with customers in crisis provided by The Farming Community Network (FCN) in April 2024. All Advice Line operatives have the details of mental health support organisations to hand, such as Breathing Space Scotland, NHS 24, RSABI and Samaritans, in case they are required and can provide a referral to the service if preferred by the caller.

Whilst the one-to-one and one-to-many contracts are separate, the Advice Line team will work hard to provide a joined-up service for Advice Line users, signposting or signing them up to one-to-many services where applicable.

Ricardo subcontract technical support services from the existing FAS one-to-one advisor base, ensuring that even the most complex enquiry receives an impartial and high-quality response from an expert.

### 8.4.1 Advice Line availability

The team deliver a rota system ensuring Advice Line resource is available continuously from 8.30am to 5.00pm, Monday to Friday to handle telephone and email enquiries. During periods of potential increased demand such as disease outbreak or flooding where additional support to the industry might be required, the Advice Line hours may be extended, to be agreed on a case-by-case basis. Outside of the core delivery hours, a voicemail facility is available, and the Advice Line team will respond during the next working day to all messages and emails received during the Advice Line out of hours period.

The Advice Line team rota ensures that at least two operatives are available at all times to take calls during core opening hours, with additional staff available as back-up should it be required. The team also rota their time managing the FAS email account to ensure that there is continuous cover and emails are responded to promptly.

In line with other Advice Line contracts managed by Ricardo, we aim for 98% uptime for the Advice Line service, and if there are any issues identified the Advice Line Manager will work to resolve them as soon as possible. Our internal IT infrastructure team are available to provide support with the Advice Line system. Scottish Government will be notified of any unplanned instances of down-time, and the Ricardo project risk and issue log will be updated with mitigations to prevent the issues being repeated.

## 8.4.2 Call handling system

Ricardo has invested in specialist systems and software to manage calls efficiently and effectively. Our call handling system enables the team to monitor the volume of incoming calls and deploys additional resource as required. From a caller's perspective waiting time is minimal, even during periods of peak activity, reducing the risk of abandoned calls (hang-ups). During opening hours, the system provides a queue to route the callers to the Ricardo Advice Line team. In the rare event that a caller is placed in the queue, the caller will hear reassurance messages. During closed hours (weekends and bank holidays) the caller will hear a message providing them with details of when the Advice Line will reopen and the option to leave a voicemail. The Advice Line team will respond to any voicemails within one working day.

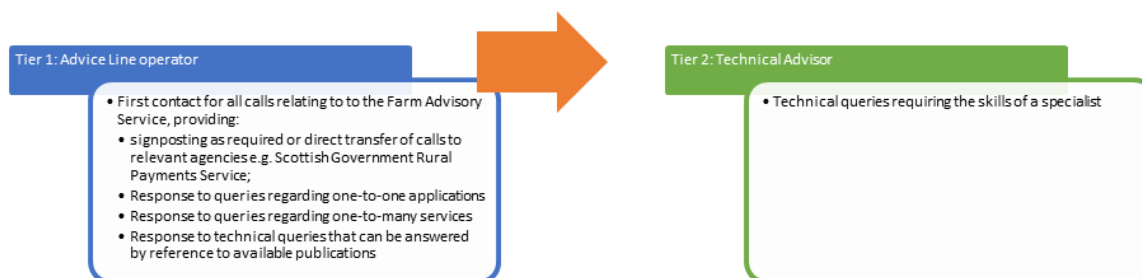
The call handling system can provide:

- Personalised messaging that can be recorded by Advice Line Manager – changes can be made very quickly
- A 'call monitor' for each agent so they can monitor incoming calls for the FAS Advice Line and can activate more resources as required
- Multiple agents can make themselves available at the same time:
- reduces the time that the caller is waiting on the line before the call is answered
- prevents risk of queues and therefore risk of abandoned calls
- All inbound and outbound calls through the call handling system are recorded and stored securely on our network:
- Allows the Advice Line Manager to undertake QA
- Advice Line Manager can listen in to live calls to ensure that enquirers are receiving the correct information
- Provision of call statistics; call logs, wait time, call duration, abandoned calls etc.

## 8.4.3 Handling Enquiries

There will be a tiered approach to responding to enquiries submitted to the FAS Advice Line.

**Figure 8: Approach to responding to Advice Line enquiries**



**Tier 1:** Our experienced team deal with most routine enquiries immediately whilst the caller is on the line or on the day that the email is received, including answering queries related to the FAS service and signposting to relevant agencies, such as Rural Payments and Services. In some instances, the Advice Line operative may need to look into an enquiry further or seek additional information from colleagues to answer the question, but these enquiries will be responded to within one working day.

**Tier 2:** If an enquiry is of a detailed or complex technical nature, it will be escalated to a technical advisor. Ricardo will utilise the services of the existing FAS one-to-one advisor pool and have developed a matrix based on their skills and experience that the Advice Line team can use to triage enquiries. In the case of a detailed enquiry, the advisor will respond to the enquirer within two working days. If the enquiry is complex and requires additional research or follow-up, the enquiry will be responded to within five working days.

The details of the Tier 2 enquiry are submitted to the advisor using an enquiry form and they resubmit the form, including details of the advice provided. The CRM tracks the details of which advisor has been assigned the enquiry, the response time and the information provided. This process ensures seamless support is provided in a timely and cost-effective manner.

If an enquiry requires a response from Scottish Government policy leads, the Advice Line Manager is responsible for sending the enquiry to the appropriate contact. The enquirer will be advised of this within a working day to manage their expectations regarding response time.

The Advice Line team will manage the email account (advice@fas.scot), all emails will receive a response within one working day of receipt. Enquiries will be escalated to an advisor as required. All enquiries will be recorded in the CRM database for reporting and QA purposes.

#### 8.4.4 Customer Relationship Management

Enquiries are logged on a Customer Relationship Management (CRM) system, including the name of the enquirer, farm information, contact details and the nature of the enquiry, our response and the number of minutes of advice provided. The enquiry will also be assigned a complexity rating, which will determine the response time requirements. The team search the system to see if a farmer has made contact previously and will add a new record to the existing contact if available. Hence, we can provide a full history of the advice provided to any contact and track the overall minutes of advice received against the 60-minute limit. The CRM is used to track enquiries requiring follow-up support, either by Ricardo or our external advisor team and includes details of when the enquiry was submitted and responded to. This information is used to monitor performance against KPIs on enquiry response time and enables us to provide Scottish Government with full and transparent information on how and when each and every minute of Advice Line time has been used.

### 8.4.5 Reporting

Monthly, annual and contractual Advice Line reporting will be included in the overall Service reporting to Scottish Government. This will include details of topics of enquiry, numbers of enquiry and time taken. Newly emerging trends in enquiries will be identified and opportunities to address this through wider service communications will be identified. Outputs against targets and KPIs will be reported.

### 8.4.6 Quality assurance, outputs and targets, KPIs

**Monitoring call quality:** We have robust quality assurance and monitoring processes and procedures; the call handling system records all incoming and outgoing calls, is backed-up daily, and stored digitally on our secure network. This enables the Advice Line Manager to monitor the quality and accuracy of advice by sampling 10% of calls each quarter. Calls can be replayed and shared with Scottish Government should a concern be raised. The system allows the Advice Line Manager to listen to live calls to assist with training and QA objectives. The system provides statistics on queue activity, call distribution, call duration, wait time and details of the agent that handled the enquiry. This information is used for planning and QA.

**Monitoring email quality and response times:** The CRM is used to capture details of all emails received by the Advice Line team, enabling the Advice Line Manager to monitor the quality and accuracy of advice by sampling 10% of emails each quarter. In addition, it allows reporting on response times against KPIs (see below) and topics of enquiries received. The Advice Line Manager will also undertake spot checks on the CRM data entry to ensure that information captured is accurate and of a high quality.

**Evaluation of Advice Line Services:** A short follow-up survey will be issued quarterly to those who have engaged with the Advice Line and provided an email address. This will allow the Advice Line Manager to evaluate the overall delivery, usefulness of advice, helpfulness of the team, whether the advice has prompted action, as well as providing opportunities for users to comment on the service to feed into our continuous improvement. The performance of the Advice Line will be monitored against KPIs (detailed in section 3)

### 8.4.7 Data security

All staff are aware of individual and programme obligations under The General Data Protection Regulation (EU) 2016/679 (GDPR), and they are provided with annual re-training. All data is held securely, and password protected (each user has a unique log-in) and can only be accessed via the Ricardo network or via a secure VPN. This is subject to regular compliance checks by the Advice Line Manager and IT security team.

## 9 PROVIDING ADDED VALUE

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### 9.1 Developing an annual self-certification for advisers

Advisers delivering the service are not subcontracted to Ricardo or Scottish Government, this means that due diligence checks such as a criminal screening that would routinely be a part of a contracting process are not undertaken. This flags as a risk as through our processes we are not selecting the adviser for the business but by approving them to undertake the work we could be considered to have an implied duty of care; to address this gap, we will implement a process of annual self-certification, requiring advisers and mentors to declare and confirm their fitness to deliver on behalf of government. This certification will be delivered electronically and developed in liaison and under the advice of Scottish Government.

### 9.2 Stakeholder Engagement

Ricardo will continue to place significant focus on stakeholder engagement and communications activities which have been proved to be instrumental in ensuring the FAS delivery is well established and integrated in wider agricultural support in Scotland. This includes supporting stakeholder meetings, providing speakers to stakeholder events and sharing content via the stakeholder pack. This engagement provides considerable added value to the service by ensuring that activities delivered by the various organisations are cohesive and collaboratively support messaging to farmers and crofters, avoiding overlap and providing good signposting to all the resources available.

### 9.3 Evolving the service

The one-to-one service provides the scope of advice required by farmers and land managers to support them to meet current challenges in the industry, key to these being business resilience and adapting to reduce climate impacts and improve biodiversity. A key focus for delivery this year will be on building the adviser capacity to deliver this support and on promoting uptake and action from farmers.

### 9.4 Providing flexibility

Ricardo will continue to seek feedback from service users, advisers delivering the service, stakeholders and Scottish government to identify how the service could better serve the needs of the sector. Ricardo will be creative and proactive in identifying how the service could flex and evolve to meet these needs. This might be through developing new one-to-one services, removing barriers to uptake or providing more training to advisers. We are committed to ensuring the service provides the best value to our clients.

### 9.5 RSABI Hardship Process

Specialist advice from FAS can support RSABI to provide support quickly and allow access to Scottish Government funding for the most vulnerable in the sector.

To provide timely and appropriate support to farmers in need, Ricardo will work in partnership with RSABI to put a call out to all appropriate specialist advisors to identify which advisors have availability and can deliver within a set timeframe (as indicated by RSABI). The applicant is of course still able to choose their own adviser if they wish and is still eligible for all the remaining grant assistance that is available as per the current scheme guidelines.

## 9.6 Carbon Audits for those who are unable to do so without adviser support

Whilst Carbon Audits are nominally closed, FAS will retain capacity to support businesses who have been flagged by RPID or Scottish Government as being unable to undertake their carbon audit without adviser support. This will not be widely communicated and will require a referral from government bodies to ensure that this is not seen as a loop hole which would result in substantial budgetary pressures.

## 9.7 Reporting against programme goals

Ricardo will provide more detailed reporting of delivery against programme goals. In the process of quality assuring a report, the reviewer will capture details of the wider impacts of each specialist advice report allowing tracking against not just the nominal category of advice, but the wider service goals. For example, a simple plan looking at the rationing of feed for livestock may be categorised as 'Farm efficiency', however the better management of livestock and resources would also provide benefits for; reducing greenhouse emissions; and potentially improving animal health and welfare. A plan to improve nutrient management may also have benefits of; reducing agro-chemical inputs; emissions reduction and improving soil management. With this more nuanced capture of data we can better support Scottish Government's reporting of progress against policy goals.

## 9.8 Piloting a new approach to ILMPs

The current ILMP is a lengthy report, the value of this is that there is clear evidence of what support the service has provided (allowing robust quality assurance) and a reference for the land manager to revisit to refresh understanding. A criticism is that:

- it is labour intensive for the advisor to deliver,
- can provide too much information for the farmer,
- allows only one period of engagement with the farmer, therefore does not provide support through implementation.

To address these issues, Ricardo will pilot an alternative model of delivery. This would be to enable the ILMP budget to deliver a staged intervention for the farmer, enabling the advisor to revisit the business over a 12-month period with lighter touch action orientated reporting delivered after each engagement to capture the discussion and resultant recommendations. The benefits of this would be that a stepped approach to identify

priority actions prevents recipients becoming overwhelmed, builds a refined action plan and enables the business to refine and evolve their actions under guidance of the adviser.

The intervention will need to be carefully designed to ensure the balance of needs are addressed, we will undertake a period of co-design involving, Scottish Government, engaged advisors, peer review group, and farmer representatives. We will pilot with a defined group of 4 advisors each undertaking an ILMP through the new mechanism with feedback assessed by all before considering a further roll out.

## 10 MANAGING ADVISER PAYMENTS

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### 10.1 Approach to managing flow-through funds

Ricardo has extensive experience of managing grant programmes and handling government funds and operate a variety of models depending on customer requirements. Ricardo will administer the payments directly to recipients on the Scottish Government's behalf. To ensure Ricardo is 'acting on behalf of' the Scottish Government who are awarding the grant, Ricardo operate a separate bank account with funds being drawn down into the dedicated bank account in accordance with financial profiling and follow the procedures outlined below.

We have developed this process to ensure the following:

- No monies are awarded without evidence of the work being completed or support being provided (evidence saved onto the CRM)
- All monies to be paid in arrears
- The monies are ring-fenced and separated from Ricardo's own accounts

#### 9.1.1 Overview of the Financial Management Process

We have established a ring-fenced client bank account at Lloyds Bank in the Service's name to facilitate the flow of funds directly to advisors from the Scottish Government.

This programme account is discrete from the operational bank accounts of the Ricardo business and the funds that pass through the account will not be accounted or reported as company turnover. The bank account is under the control of a financial manager with payments authorised using established and agreed procedures that include dual consents to release payments by electronic transfer. Interest accumulated on this bank account is the property of the Scottish Government and will be repaid upon request or closure of the bank account.

The service manager is responsible for ensuring the following process is adhered to.

- Only authorise a payment to an advisor once we have received and quality assured both the:



- visit report and
- signed feedback and declaration form.

The Finance Manager's role is critical to providing an additional layer of review and oversight to ensure that the process is followed, and any anomalies are identified and investigated.

Control and tracking of each transaction is managed through our CRM system. This in turn has a direct link with our Agresso accounting system. All requests for funding from the Scottish Government are based on a draft **funding schedule** from the CRM system for transactions where the above criteria are met. No requests for funding will be made without review and approval of the Finance Manager and Service Manager.

### 9.1.2 Batch Funding

All claims that meet the above criteria will be batched into the draft funding schedule. A monthly reconciliation will be conducted by the Finance Manager and the Service Manager cross checking payments against the records in the CRM (visit reports, evaluation forms etc). This cross-checking will be conducted on a sample of payments to ensure that 1) the payment should have been made (reports issued and passed QA), 2) the required evidence was in place to authorise payment.

The funding schedule runs on an established 4 weekly cycle. Once approval is received the funding schedule is deemed final and is automatically uploaded onto the Agresso system for payment. When the agreed funding is received from the Scottish Government, the subsequent payments to the advisors are initiated via a BACS payment.

Electronic copies of programme bank account statements can be provided at such intervals as Scottish Government requires or on request by e-mail. The programme account will be subject to audit by our internal and external auditors, and subject to any audit Scottish Government might wish to undertake.

The accounting system used by Ricardo (Agresso) is a top-tier, global accounting system well recognised within industry, specifically designed to handle large project and programme management funds. Agresso is compliant with the requirements of the National Audit Office, HMRC and the London Stock Exchange in the UK and the control of projects and transactions required by European funding.

This process has been developed and honed over many years with disbursements of public funds through this mechanism approaching £100 million paid out in a single year at the peak of activity. Our management of such bank accounts and funds has passed all scrutiny and audits by the funding Departments and the National Audit Office.

Whilst this process is our suggested approach other models are available. The outcome of this process is:

- A dedicated programme account administered on behalf of the Scottish Government
- Robust double and triple-checks ensuring accurate payments of transparency



- A simplified approach for the Scottish Government only requiring one monthly payment

However, this process does limit our ability to make ad hoc payments to advisors or to expedite the process by making payment runs bi-weekly to reduce the time an advisor (predominantly a small business) has to wait to be paid. This could be nearly 8 weeks if the advisor sends an invoice just after the previous funding schedule has been raised.

## 11 MONITORING AND EVALUATION

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Feedback from customers will be collected after the delivery of each advice activity via the 'Feedback and Declaration Form'. The aim is that no advice visit will be closed out for payment until this form is received, however to allow fairness to advisers, if Ricardo has chased a business 3 times and feedback is still not forthcoming we will move the grant to payment. Through review of this data we will seek to understand the perceived value of advice and measures farmer/crofter intends to implement. This data will provide valuable insight into where improvements can be made to the service or internal processes, which we will seek to implement to continually improve and enhance our delivery.

Ricardo will formally report on the feedback from each of the grant schemes on an annual basis. This will include providing a full analytical report of the feedback received but also analytics to identify who is using the service and how they are accessing the advice to help inform future delivery. Whilst formal reporting is conducted on an annual basis, Ricardo will continue to extract data for Scottish Government on an ad hoc basis to respond to queries or help inform policy decisions.

## 12 ADVISER SKILLS

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To ensure the quality of advisory support, the Service requires that Integrated Land Management Plans are delivered by advisers who are FBAASS accredited (Farm Business Advisor Accreditation Service Scotland). Due to the very broad range of skills and experience required in the delivery of the specialist advice this delivery is not limited to FBAASS advisers. It is required that Ricardo verify on an individual basis if advisers have the required level of education and professional experience.

### 12.1 Accreditation of FBAASS Advisers

Advisers delivering ILMPs must be FBAASS accredited. Lantra manages this process and reaccrredit advisers on an annual basis. Lantra will ensure a wide coverage of advisers to avoid gaps in capability or geographical coverage. Lantra actively promotes FBAASS accreditation, targeting advisers with a strong reputation.

Lantra work independently to manage this accreditation process and reaccrredit advisers on an annual basis. In reaccrrediting Lantra will take into account evidence of ILMP reports that they have reviewed during the

previous delivery year. If an adviser is new to the programme or has not delivered an ILMP within the year then they will be required to provide further examples of their work for resubmission.

In addition to evidence of work, Lantra also stipulate that each adviser must demonstrate continued learning and gain 20 CPD points during the year.

Lantra are tasked with ensuring the advisor panel is sufficiently robust with approximately an appropriate ratio of advisers from SAC to other organisations. Lantra actively promote FBAASS accreditation to advisers and specifically target advisers who have a reputation for delivering high quality services. Word of mouth/adviser recommendation is an important marketing tool for the programme, it is important that we do not disadvantage farmers in certain geographies simply by having insufficient advisers in the region. Should reviews identify a need to recruit more advisers Ricardo and Lantra will work to fill the gap.

## 12.2 Quality Assurance

Ricardo provides a fully trained team supported by thorough quality control mechanisms. The service manager is responsible for ensuring that the QA procedures are adhered to.

With a pool of advisers delivering the service, it is important that each report meets our quality standards. Ricardo implements the following process. All ILMPs are peer reviewed by a panel of experts, all other reports are reviewed in-house by Ricardo. Ricardo works to a review turnaround of <10 days. The reviewers provide a comprehensive report. If revisions are required, the adviser has two weeks to update the reports and re-submit. Details of issues, and corrective actions agreed are recorded.

**Table 2 Grading of ILMPs**

Technical Score	Description
10	Technical advice provided appears to fully meet client requirements
9	Technical advice provided appears to substantially meet client requirements
8	Minor omission in terms of technical advice which does not substantively affect the business.
7	Minor omission in terms of technical advice which affects the business and should have been identified and explored within the report.
6	Significant omission in terms of technical advice which affects the business and should have been identified and explored within the report.
5	Major omissions in technical advice in one part of the report which could have a significant effect on the business.
4	Inappropriate advice in one part or throughout the report which is clearly identifiable from the evidence presented in the report.
3	Serious technical errors in most of the report
2	Serious technical errors in all areas of the report
1	Insufficient technical information in to allow any assessment (report generic not tailored to the client)

If any adviser's reports are consistently below standard (Score <5) and in agreement with the Scottish Government, then the adviser will not receive FBAASS accreditation the following year.

**Figure 9: Report submission process**

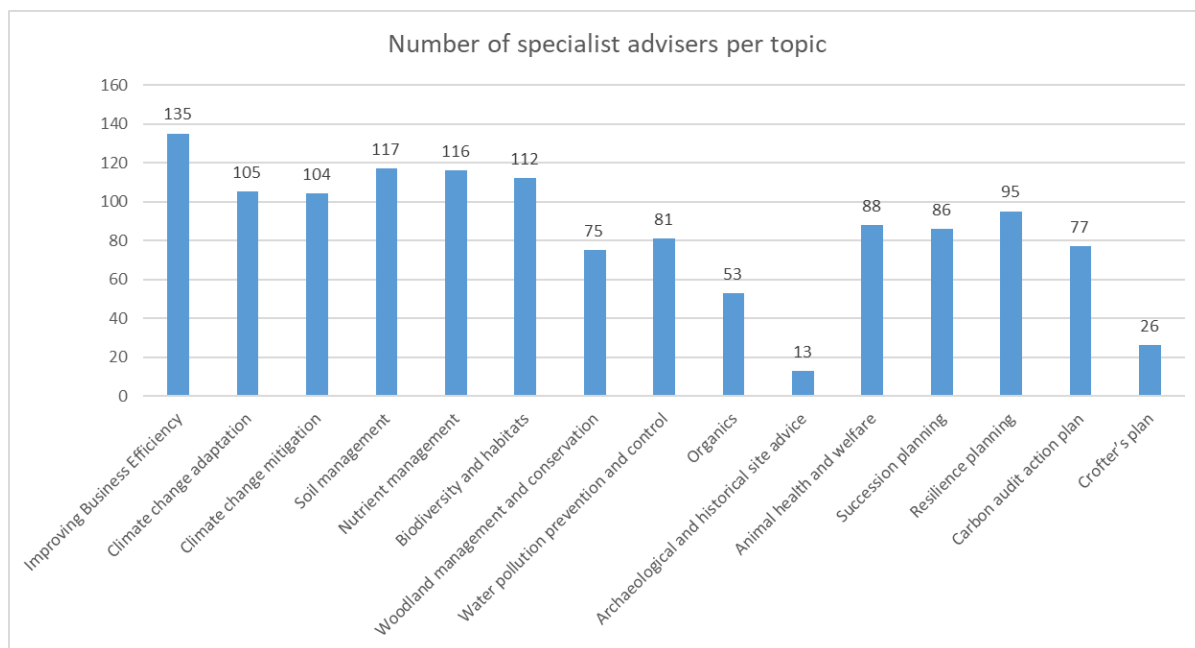


### 12.3 Verification of Specialist Advisers

The delivery of specialist advice is open to any adviser, subject to verification by Ricardo that the adviser is sufficiently qualified and experience. The requirement is for evidence of relevant training and a minimum of four years' experience delivering on the specific topic. The details of all advisers approved by the service

are maintained in database and [available](#) to aid farmers/land managers on the FAS Specialist Advice Webpage to help businesses to identify a suitable adviser. A business may also choose an adviser out with that list and Ricardo will work with that adviser to establish that these checks are completed. There are currently 242 specialist advisers who have been approved by Ricardo.

**Figure 10 Chart to show specialisms of advisers**



## 12.4 Adviser Training

FAS provides training to ensure advisers have the skills to meet the needs of current and future agricultural government policy/targets. Ricardo uses a range of techniques from training events to update communications to ensure advisers have the information and support they need to deliver to their best. Ricardo will deliver a flexible training programme to respond to changing needs of the programme and needs identified through stakeholder engagement and programme evaluation.

It is envisaged that 6 training sessions will be delivered in 2025, the topics of these will remain flexible to ensure we can reinforce and support key messaging from government, it is anticipated that training will cover:

- Expectations of an ILMP- a practical session looking at what makes a good ILMP, with advisers themselves learning through reviewing and assessing a variety of reports.
- Biodiversity- key asks of farmers.
- Biodiversity- sustainable and regenerative farming practices explored
- Soil Health- protecting and restoring our soils.
- Organic farming- an update on uptake, policy direction, and support available/resources for farmers.

- Irrigation and managing water on farms.
- Recognising signs of stress and supporting farmers and crofters to access support.
- Policy update for 2025 (post SAF) - the agricultural roadmap revisited, update on the Whole Farm Plan, EFAs, suckler beef scheme and muirburn code.

## 13 MARKETING AND COMMUNICATIONS

The aims of the marketing activities are to:

- Raise awareness of the FAS One-to-One support and inform farmers and crofters as to how it could support them.
- Stimulate the interest of farmers and crofters in making changes to improve the climate impacts, biodiversity and resilience of their businesses.
- Generate sufficient applications to meet the programme targets
- Whilst all elements of the service need promoting, it is anticipated that we will continue to see a strong demand for Specialist Advice. Therefore, the ILMPs, mentoring and young farmers are a particular focus of our marketing activities in this plan.

**Table 3 Summary of key marketing activities in 2025**

Marketing approaches	Number of activities supported
Case studies	5
Informational videos	2
Direct mail	4
Public Relations	12
Stakeholder engagement	4
Social media (organic and paid)	
X	24
Facebook	24
Google Ads	3
Website review	1

## 13.1 Case Studies

A key focus will be highlighting the value of the one-to-one services. Written and video case studies will be developed and hosted on the FAS website and promoted via the FAS newsletter, social media, and direct mail. These will focus on engaging farmers and crofters, raising awareness, stimulating interest and prompting action. We recommend five case studies are developed; these will showcase real people using the services and inspire others to act. Ultimately, we want to highlight the value of these services. We propose the focus of the case studies for development to be chosen from the following or similar topics:

- The value of mentoring for new entrants, how it works, how to apply and the benefits seen by other farmers.
- Where to go if you need help as a young farmer (focus on helpline and mentoring)
- Benefiting from an ILMP as an established business
- The value of an ILMP to a new entrant
- Support available to crofters

Surviving and thriving through addressing climate impacts of the business. In developing case studies we will prioritise examples of regenerative agriculture, adaptive grazing, farming with nature

- Making farming work for you, mental well-being, work life balance

The case studies must:

- Resonate with the different audiences for the service: farmers, crofters, land managers and their advisors
- Explore the drivers for change
- Explain the support on offer; and
- illustrate how their farm/business has benefitted

## 13.2 Informational videos

Two short information videos will be produced these will promote the wider service using images, video and animations to publicise the service and to offer value added information to farmers.

- General overview, introducing the different support that is available and providing a user journey from application to completion
- Introduce how the FAS can support the Whole Farm Plan and integrate with wider support available via the Pilot for Sustainable Farming

### 13.3 Direct Mail

Direct mail will be used to promote the services available through both the One-to-One and One-To-Many services, publicise events and encourage recipients to get in contact. Ricardo will identify mailing lists for direct mail from our own database of engaged contacts but also by looking to integrate content into mailings delivered by other stakeholders working with our target group, for example: Scottish Government/RPID/ the FONE Group; Lantra; Crofting Commission; Scottish Crofting Federation; NFUS; SAYF; and through the one-to-many contract. The planned focus of direct mail in 2025 is:

- Engaging Young Farmers – with a specific focus on the value of a new entrant's ILMP, mentoring, specialist advice and advice line as a valuable resource.
- ILMP, promoting the ILMP to contacts who have already engaged with other FAS services
- Crofters, ensuring crofters are aware of the range of support available to them and feel encouraged to utilise the grants and advice line.

### 13.4 Public Relations (PR)

PR can be a very effective way of reaching audiences who are difficult to access via other channels. Technical articles developed for the target audience and specific media/publications will be developed to take the FAS messages to as wide a farming audience as possible. Three main channels are proposed:

- A biweekly 250–300-word article in Scottish Farmer.
- Stakeholder news channels e.g., newsletters and other updates from professional and other farming bodies and organisations e.g., NFU, CLA etc.
- Farming and business correspondents on Scottish regional consumer media (print, broadcast & online) where there is related news relevant to the target audience.

We plan to use the Scottish Farmer articles across different channels to maximise their impact. Repurposing well-received articles is essential to ensuring key messages reach a wider audience through different formats, such as social media posts, web content, email newsletters, and video snippets. This approach reinforces engagement, extends content lifespan, and enhances overall visibility.

### 13.5 Stakeholder Engagement

Stakeholder packs are developed quarterly for networks to disseminate information about FAS's services. These packs will include relevant articles, videos, social media posts, upcoming events, and other appropriate content for the target audience.

The team will review the current stakeholder packs to assess their effectiveness and relevance and provide recommendations on how they can be improved to better engage and inform key stakeholders.

In particular we will look into any collaboration opportunities with the National Federation of Young Farmers' Clubs to raise awareness of the programme and stimulate engagement among young farmers, particularly with the helpline initially and hoping to bring the service to front of mind for future support.

The 147 FBAASS advisors/associates and 242 specialist advisers spread throughout Scotland are another route to the farming community which will be utilised. Ongoing engagement with the FAS advisors is essential to ensure we are delivering the right kind of information using the right channels for them.

## 13.6 Social Media

We will continue to use X (formally Twitter) to communicate key FAS messages and events. It will be used to support the PR programme as well as distribute other topical information regarding FAS services. The programme will seek to grow its audience and to optimise the use of this medium as this provides a very cost-efficient means of communicating. Twitter posts are drafted to coincide with the 2-weekly Scottish Farmer article to ensure consistency of message and maximise content.

We wish to grow our Facebook activity by investing in Facebook advertising on the SFAS page. A paid-for, targeted social media campaign of sponsored Facebook ads is proposed to help grow the user and audience base. Audiences will be segmented by type and suitable social media content developed.

Key considerations when setting up Facebook ads

- Objective Alignment – Ensure the campaign objective (e.g., traffic, conversions, engagement) matches project goals.
- Target Audience – Define your audience based on demographics, interests, behaviours, or use custom/lookalike audiences.
- Budget & Bidding Strategy – Choose a budget (daily or lifetime) and bidding strategy (cost per result, lowest cost, etc.).
- Ad Format & Creative – Choose the right format (image, video, carousel) and use high-quality visuals with engaging copy.
- Call-to-Action (CTA) – Ensure your CTA is clear and relevant to encourage user action (e.g., “Shop Now,” “Learn More”).
- Performance Monitoring & Optimization – Regularly check Ads Manager to analyze key metrics (CTR, CPC, ROAS) and make data-driven adjustments.
- Google Ads

A Google ads search campaign (sponsored link appears when stakeholders search for service FAS offers) and a display campaign (retargeting people who've visited the FAS website before with banner ads and images) are proposed to help drive traffic to the website and increase one-to-one registrations. The ads will focus on the areas including mentoring and ILMPs.



## 13.7 Website

The content management for the One-to-One section of the website is controlled by SAC. We will conduct a web review of the one-to-one services section to analyse usability, navigation, and overall user experience to identify potential friction points. By assessing layout, content clarity, and call-to-action effectiveness, we can suggest improvements that streamline the user journey, making it easier for visitors to find relevant information and take action.

## 13.8 E-newsletter

Contribute content to the FAS newsletter, managed by the one-to-many service. It is important that this newsletter is regularly distributed and that we continue to grow the readership.

## 13.9 Monitoring and Evaluation

**Table 4 Metrics to evaluation impacts of marketing activities**

Marketing activity	Inputs	Outputs	Impacts
Case studies	Number of case studies	Video and written case studies for use with various marketing collateral e.g. on website, direct mail etc.	Increases awareness and interest. Stimulates action.
Videos	Number of short informational videos	Response/ Number of views	Increases awareness and positions FAS as knowledge leaders
Direct mail	Number of DMs sent	Response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website visits</li> <li>Information downloads</li> <li>Telephone/e-mail enquiries.</li> </ul>	Number of grant applications
PR	Number of press releases issued	Amount of coverage Response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Website visits</li> <li>Information downloads</li> <li>Telephone/e-mail enquiries.</li> </ul>	Number of grant applications
Stakeholder engagement	Number and type of stakeholders engaged	Feedback from stakeholders Response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder pack downloads</li> <li>Website visits</li> <li>Telephone/e-mail enquiries.</li> </ul>	Number of grant applications

Social media (organic and paid for)	Number of Tweets/	Response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Shares/retweets/interactions</li> <li>• Website visits</li> <li>• Information downloads</li> <li>• Telephone/e-mail enquiries.</li> </ul>	Number of grant applications
Advertising -print and online	No of adverts generated	Response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website visits</li> <li>• Information downloads</li> <li>• Telephone/email enquiries</li> </ul>	Number of grant applications
Website	Review of webpages & content	Response: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Website visits/pages visited</li> <li>• Information downloads</li> </ul> Telephone/e-mail Enquiries.	Number of grant applications